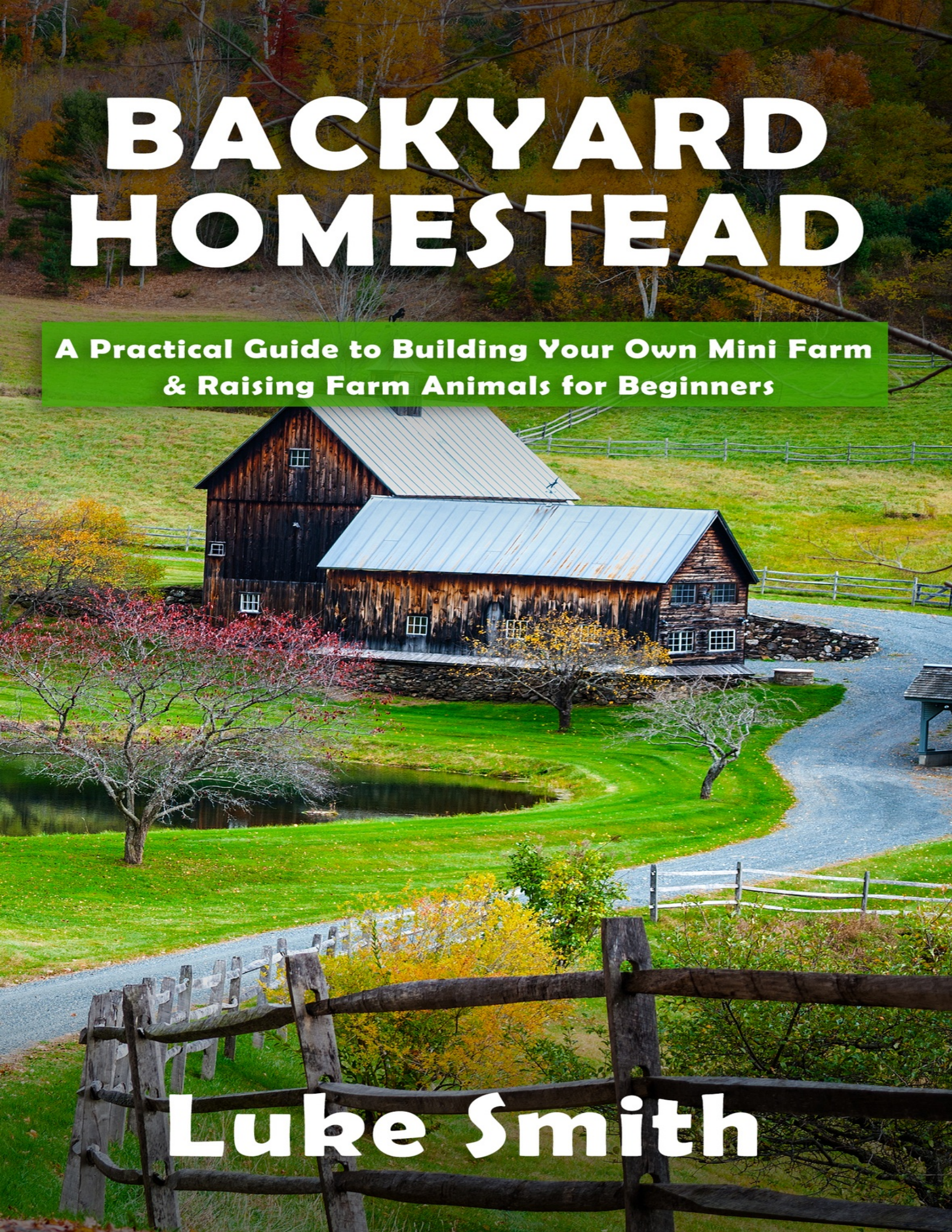
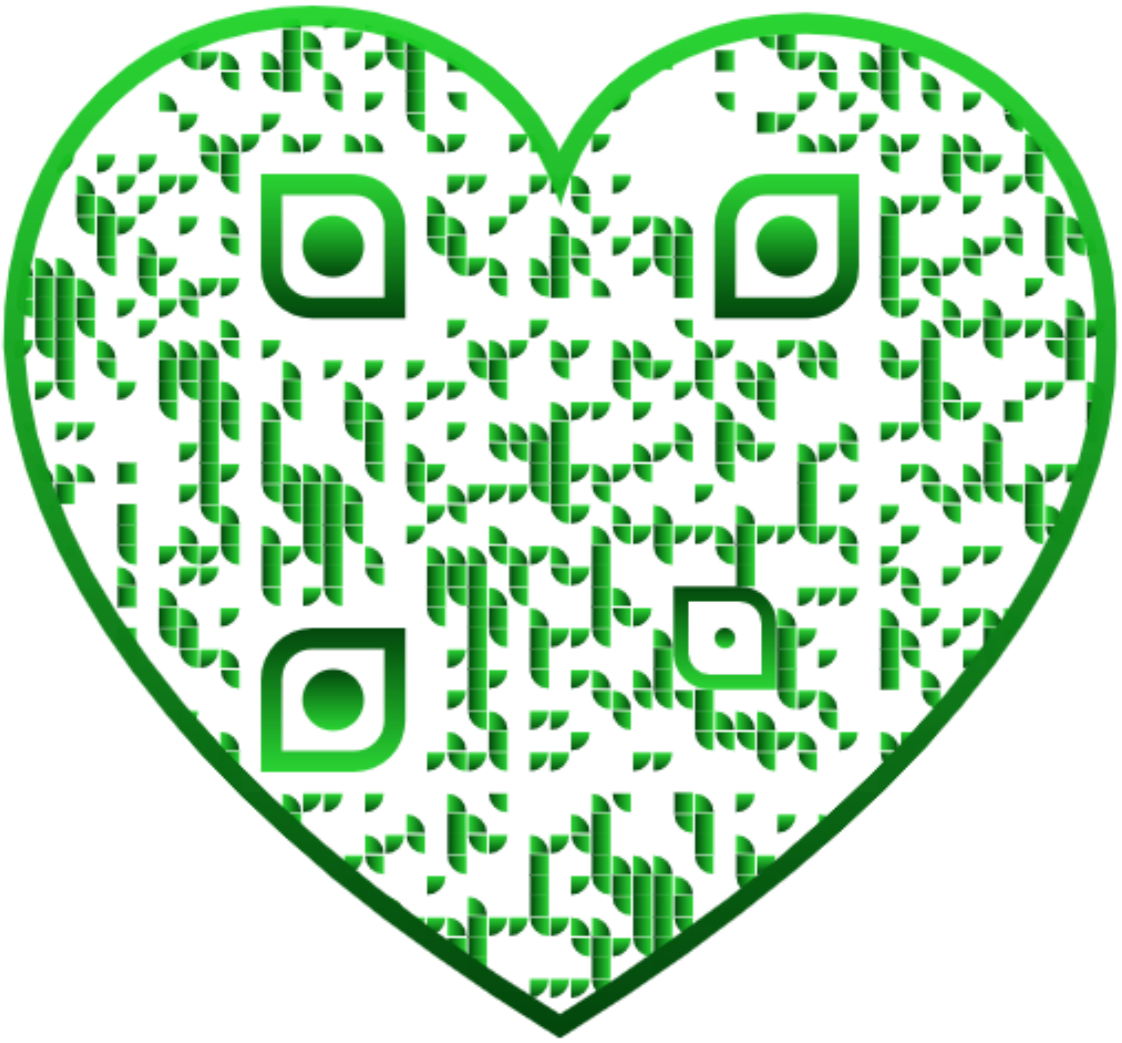

BACKYARD HOMESTEAD
A Practical Guide to Building Your Own Mini Farm & Raising Farm Animals for Beginners
Luke Smith



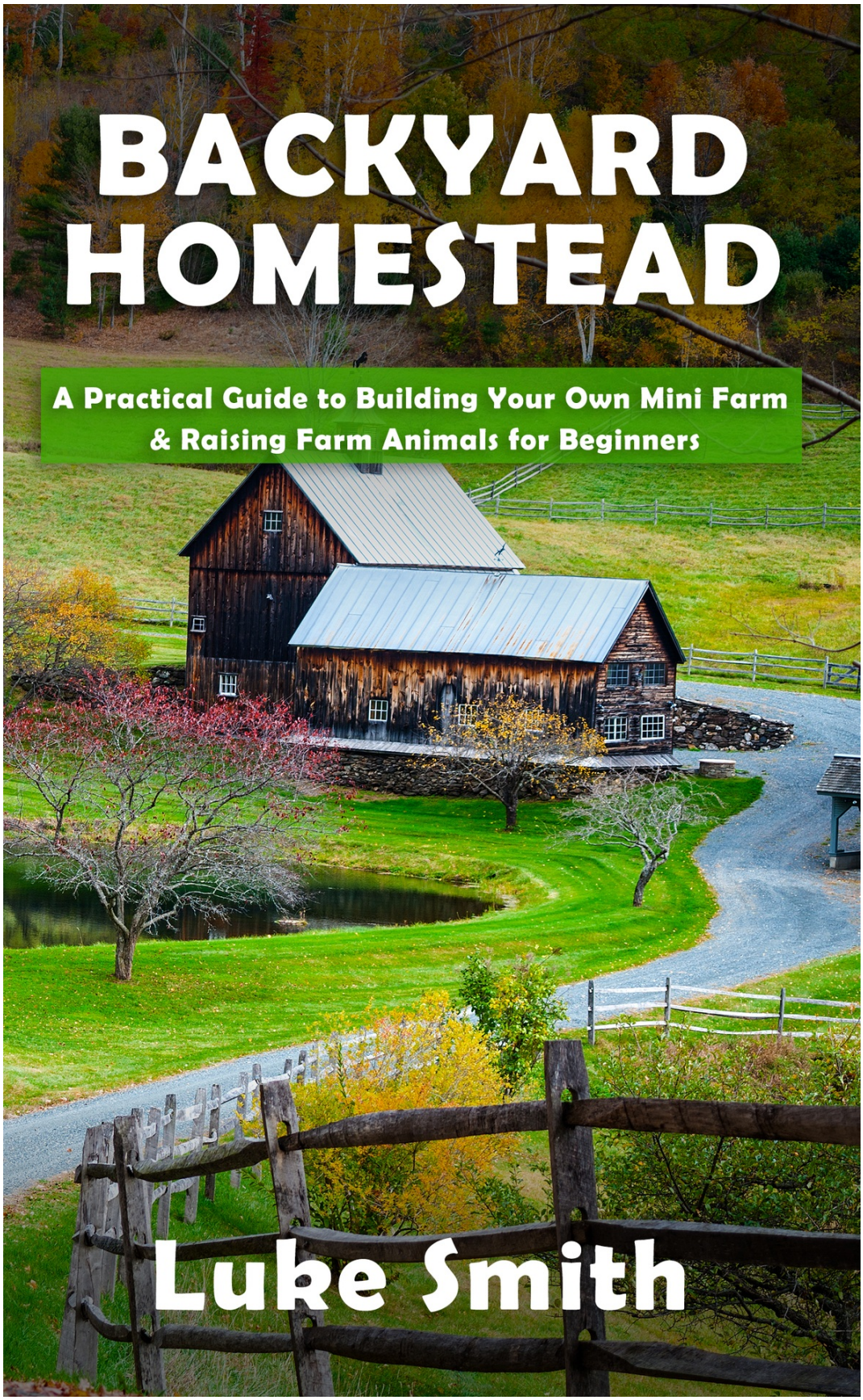

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Chapter One - Why Start A Backyard Homestead?

Chapter Two - Starting Your Home Garden

Chapter Three - Growing Grains On Your Homestead

Chapter Four - Setting Up Your Barn

Chapter Five - Raising Chickens

Chapter Six - Raising Goats

Chapter Seven - Raising Cows

Chapter Eight - Raising Honey Bees

Final Words

INTRODUCTION

These days the cost of food continues to grow and people have begun to jokingly refer to the apocalypse. While these two events are unrelated, they share a similar DNA. No biblical apocalypse is about to happen but the world is changing and one of the things that have become clear is that there must be other ways to provide food for our families. We can't just rely on big business to farm and raise livestock for us.

Big business relies on chemical fertilizers to increase crop yield but this comes at a cost. These chemicals are introduced into our food and therefore our diets. We're not supposed to be consuming these chemicals… yet we do. And livestock is often even worse, with famous scandals involving growth steroids and maltreatment. The world has a growing sense that there are not only health consequences to these practices but also moral consequences that we are guilty of by our continued support.

For a time we looked past these issues. It was these very same practices that allowed us to eat a full meal at a much lower cost than the organically grown fruits and vegetables sold at farmers' markets. Meat was inexpensive due to these practices, too, and so a full plate (or a full stomach, rather) made up for any health or moral qualms we may have had.

But as prices continue to rise, we have to stop and ask ourselves if it is still worth the risk and the cruelty to animals that come with the territory. What's more, if you really do believe that the apocalypse is coming then what does that mean for our supply chains going forward? In all of our media and projections of that future, have we ever seen a still-functioning big business farm? No, of course not. If the world collapses, so too does industry.

While I personally don't believe that the apocalypse is anywhere near, the fear of such has actually had a profoundly positive effect on the world. Specifically, people have begun to learn to and practice growing their own vegetables and raising their own livestock. This makes me extremely happy to see because it means that people are learning to step away from predatory business practices to look after themselves and their families with their own two hands.

In this book, I am going to teach you how to get started making your own backyard homestead so that you can provide food for your family no matter what happens to the world around you. This way, you can always rest easy knowing that you have food. These skills are important for us adults to learn but I want to also implore you to teach these skills to your children. As parents, we want nothing more than to provide our children with what they need to stay healthy and live happily. If you teach these skills to your children, you teach them how to never go hungry. In my humble opinion, it is the greatest gift a parent can provide.

Each chapter will narrow its focus to look at how each piece of a backyard homestead is managed. When it comes to creating your own, remember that you don't need to follow each of these pieces of advice. For example, you might want to raise goats and chickens but choose to pass on cattle. But despite this, I do want to suggest that you read the chapter on cattle. While you might not follow it, knowledge is power and it will give you a grounding of understanding should you change your mind later.

Chapter one will introduce you to this concept in more depth. While it is easy to say that a backyard homestead will provide your family with food, what does this mean exactly? How do we achieve this goal? How much work do we need to put in? How much does it cost? How much maintenance does it require? Many of these questions will be answered more specifically throughout the book, as the cost to start a home garden or raise cattle are quite different. But chapter one will allow us to start to explore them and get a grounding on the subject that will carry us forward.

In chapter two we will see what it takes to start a home garden to grow vegetables, fruits and herbs. We'll look at how we can reduce the amount of space it takes to grow them, too, so that we can maximize our available space for larger yields or multiple crops. This focus on growing our own food will be followed up on in chapter three where we'll look at growing grains like wheat, rye or oats. Rather than simply give you a guide on how to grow one or two different edible crops, these chapters will focus on giving you the knowledge you need to grow anything you want. Yes, we will look at a couple in specific but this wider picture will ensure that you are well-grounded in the concepts of crop farming.

We'll move into what could loosely be considered the second part of the book as we enter chapter four. This chapter will look at how you can set up a

barn of your own. Rather than look at building a barn, which would require us to learn carpentry, we'll look at how we can convert a shed into a barn. Remember that many areas don't allow you to erect a structure on your property without permission. However, if you already have a shed then you will be able to convert it without needing any paperwork. But just because you can convert a shed doesn't mean that it is legal for you to raise livestock on your property. Always check the laws in your local area, as well as in your state or province.

Chapter five explores raising chickens; chapter six looks at raising goats; chapter seven takes on the task of raising cows; chapter eight closes out the book with a look at how to raise honey bees. Each of these will look at the benefits of raising these animals, as well as the associated costs (both monetary and time-wise). I don't personally elevate any one of these animals above the rest, picking which is right for you is simply a matter of taste and logistics.

Together, these eight chapters teach you much of what you need to know about backyard homesteading. But there are still other options available to us for how we might go about this. As we only have so much space here, the final words will be used to suggest other ways in which you may decide to expand your backyard homestead in the future. With a little creativity and forethought, you'll find that there are many ways in which you can maximize your space, earn money from the practice, expand your diet and work in other productive angles such as raising sheep for wool or using aquaponics to raise fish at the same time you grow crops. So while the book in your hands is expansive, you should take it as the first step of many on your backyard homestead adventure.

CHAPTER ONE

WHY START A BACKYARD HOMESTEAD?

We've answered this question in a brief form already. The reason to start a backyard homestead is so that we can take control of our lives, specifically where our food comes from and how healthy it is for us to consume it. With hundreds of scandals coming to light within the agricultural industry, it should come as no surprise that more and more people have decided to take the leap into growing and raising their own food. It is a smart choice that they have made.

And by purchasing this book, you have demonstrated that you are also prepared to start making this transition. I won't lie and tell you that it will be

easy. The truth is that it will take a lot of work. But the biggest piece of work comes at the beginning when we need to set everything up for the first time. Yes, there is lots of maintenance to be done to keep your backyard homestead functioning properly but many people, myself included, find this experience to be quite rewarding and relaxing. It might be hard work but it's hard work that leaves you with a sense of purpose, of belonging. There is just something about watching a crop grow to harvest or collecting fresh chicken eggs for your breakfast that fills you with pride. The fact that your two hands could achieve everything you need to fill your family's stomachs is just so powerful. You might not know what I mean yet, but you will shortly once you start to get your hands dirty.

In this chapter, we will start by looking at what it means to be self-sufficient and how a backyard homestead can help us get there. Being self-sufficient is about more than just growing or raising your own food, though this is a strong part of it. We'll follow this discussion with looks at why growing vegetables and raising livestock is so rewarding. To minimize the amount of repetition in the book, these sections will be brief. Consider them preparation for the chapters that look at them in more depth.

Having a Self-Sufficient Lifestyle

Before we can define what a self-sufficient lifestyle is, we should first define the concept of self-sufficiency. What does it mean to be self-sufficient? How can a family be self-sufficient when there are multiple people?

To begin with, we need to expand our definition of self. Rather than looking at ourselves as an individual, let us look at our family as a self-contained unit. We live together and look after each other. Within our home, we represent our own nation-state with rules set by those in charge and followed by the younger members. However, most families are not self-sufficient. They rely on food and income from other sources. Each member of the family can help to support one another, creating a higher level of self-sufficiency than someone who lives alone. For example, a college student can ask their parents for advice or help when they live at home but they need to reach outside of their home for that same help when they live by themselves. So for the sake of understanding, self-sufficiency as we'll define it sees the self as the household in question rather than the individual.

With that solved, what then is self-sufficiency? To be self-sufficient can be

defined in two ways. One meaning relates to the confidence a person has. When someone is confident in their own abilities, they are self-sufficient. This definition might seem irrelevant for our purposes but we'll be touching on it again in a moment. The other definition is more in line with what you are probably thinking. That definition sees self-sufficiency as meaning that a person is able to care for all of their needs (food, shelter, etc.) without help from the outside world.

Without help from the outside world means that a person can make enough money on their own to have ends meet. They can cover their rent or mortgage, they can keep food on the table and they can pay the bills necessary to keep the lights and heat on. We often see these are the end-all signs of self-sufficiency but they shouldn't be. You could go to work at Walmart and make enough money to achieve these goals but are you really self-sufficient? Your food is still coming from the store, your money is entirely reliant upon working to earn a profit for a corporation that doesn't care about you and a recession could easily see you without a job. If you could lose your job at any moment, how sufficient are you? We have convinced ourselves that this is a form of self-sufficiency but we are horribly mistaken.

To live a truly self-sufficient lifestyle, we must take control of these factors. This is where backyard homesteading comes in. As you learn to grow crops and raise livestock, you are learning how to become more responsible for your own needs without the need for outside assistance. This is most easily understood when we consider food as part of self-sufficiency. Crops provide fruits, vegetables and herbs. Livestock provides meat, eggs and other products which can be made from the raw resources they produce. So backyard homesteading helps us to take control of our diets.

But what about that other need that was mentioned? Money.

to keep our home and our backyard homestead, we need to have enough money for rent and power. Surely this points towards a limitation of the backyard homesteading lifestyle, right?

Wrong.

There is a lot of money to be made this way. Crops can be sold locally, both directly to customers or to stores and restaurants. The products produced by your livestock can be sold but so too can the livestock themselves. In fact, if you

decide to raise bees then you might be shocked to learn that you can even rent your bees out to local farmers. We'll get more into that in chapter eight, don't worry. But what this means is that this isn't just a way to provide food for your family. This can be a way to earn your income. Depending on how seriously you want to take backyard homesteading, it can easily become your main source of income. Now, it will require time and money to get going. So don't quit your day job just yet. But if quitting is a goal of yours then backyard homesteading offers one way through which you can make that dream a reality.

Now, remember how I said we would come back to that earlier point about confidence? Self-sufficiency can be defined as having total confidence in your abilities or your capability. I say capability because this one is a little broader. For example, you might not have the ability to provide medical treatment to your livestock but you can still be fully capable of seeking out and getting this treatment. This might sound like it blurs the line of self-sufficiency but it doesn't. Being self-sufficient doesn't mean you don't have to rely on others at times. We all need to get medical care or legal advice, we all have to rely on delivery men to bring us the tools and resources we've purchased. Being self-sufficient does not mean being cut off from the world or cutting ourselves off from making use of services that benefit us.

But knowing that we are able to use our own two hands to provide food and make a living instills a level of confidence that has to be felt to be understood. This confidence is further boosted by the knowledge that we fill our brains with. Following up on that last example, having the knowledge to recognize that your livestock are sick is a sign of self-sufficiency. Being able to recognize a problem and then reach out and hire the appropriate services to treat the problem is a sign of self-sufficiency. This point is extremely important because many people seem to think that self-sufficiency means entirely relying on the self for everything that they encounter. But this is not self-sufficiency, this is self-delusion. We aren't infallible after all.

Self-sufficiency, as we defined, means that we can supply our own needs. This means food, money, shelter. We don't need a vet to treat our livestock. If they get sick and die, we continue to live. We might lose money and have to tighten our belts but we don't lose home or health. It is these needs that the self-sufficient lifestyle looks to provide and it is these needs that we will be mastering throughout this book.

Growing Vegetables, Fruits and Herbs

Growing vegetables, fruits and herbs are the cheapest part of a backyard homestead. If you absolutely had to you could grow them with nothing more than a few seeds and the ground in your backyard. Of course, it is going to be a little bit more complicated than this if you want to do it properly but we'll be tackling that in the next chapter.

For now, let's consider why vegetables, fruits and herbs make for sure a great part of a backyard homestead. Of course, the cheap cost to get started growing crops is one plus that cannot be ignored. Many backyard homesteads first began as a backyard vegetable garden. But if this was the only benefit that growing crops offered then this would be a much shorter chapter.

The other factor that we can't look past is the simple fact that these crops provide us with nutritious and delicious foods for our dinner table. We all know that vegetables are high in nutrients and they make for a part of a healthy diet but what about fruit and herbs? Fruits offer us a way of indulging our sweet tooth. The natural sugars in fruit make them sweet and mouthwateringly tasty but without the need for processed sugars. We can get those same sugars directly

from the source, essentially. And while herbs are used to spice up and add flavor to a dish, did you know that they are jam-packed with so many nutrients that they make vegetables look like slackers? On a pound for pound basis, the nutritional values of garden herbs are astronomically higher than vegetables. Of course, they shouldn't just be eaten raw on their own but adding them to your garden and thus your diet is one of the smartest choices you can make for your health.

But the health benefits and the cheap cost are only the two most obvious benefits. So what about the rest? Let us remember that we are talking about growing vegetables, fruits and herbs as part of a backyard homestead and not merely just starting a vegetable garden. When we raise animals as part of our homestead, we find that we have to deal with animal poop. On its own, this isn't very fun. But if you are also growing a garden then this means that you have direct access to free manure. Plus you can turn around and use a portion of the vegetables you grow to feed your animals, making it a circular relationship.

Vegetables are also a profitable venture. People have to eat and many like eating healthy, organically grown fruits and vegetables that haven't been polluted with chemical fertilizers. When you factor in the low cost to get started growing these crops, it is easy to quickly turn a profit with them. Being able to quickly turn a profit is important for those looking to use their backyard homestead as a way of paying the bills.

Many think of vegetable farming as a purely spring to fall activity. However, with the use of greenhouses or hydroponic approaches, you can grow pretty much anything anytime with a little bit of dedication. Plus there are even a few crops that can be put into the ground and survive the winter such as cauliflower, leeks, kale, parsnips or winter squash. With a little bit of planning, a vegetable garden can provide food for you and your family throughout every season. If you plant onions, garlic, spring onions, peas or asparagus, they can survive the winter to be ready to harvest early spring. A little bit of research will provide you with an absolute ton of variety for each and every season.

In the next chapter when we look at growing these crops, we'll look at how we go about planting, maintaining and harvesting them, as well as what techniques we can use to maximize our available space so that we can plant more. We won't be able to look at each and every type of vegetable, fruit or herb but the techniques used for growing each will be quite similar to each other. So by learning the general principles you will be able to apply them, with minor

tweaks, so that you can grow whatever crops you enjoy the most.

Raising Farm Animals

Farm animals take a lot more money to start raising. For one, you need to purchase the animals themselves and it costs a lot more to purchase a living creature compared to a pack of vegetable seeds. On top of that, it also takes a lot more space to house these animals. Chicks require a coop, cows and goats should be provided a barn for shelter. You need to build a fence to keep them from roaming free. You'll also need to make sure that there aren't any harmful plants present as some animals, especially goats, can get extremely sick by eating the wrong thing.

All in all, it takes a lot of time, a lot of effort and a lot of money to start raising your own farm animals. But the rewards are well worth it. They provide plenty of food. The meat from one cow could provide food for a family throughout the entire winter. Of course, this should be combined with vegetables to keep the meal nutritious but if all you had was one cow, it could keep you alive.

But beyond the foods, which we'll look at in a moment, these animals should be seen as a long term investment. When you decide that you are going to raise livestock, you must build the necessary structures such as that barn and fence. These upfront costs are quite high but once you have managed them, you don't need to spend that much every again. If you build a barn in 2020, you could still be using that barn in the year 3000. It'll need repairs and maintenance but these costs are negligible compared to the initial investment. In that time, you could have raised hundreds if not thousands of cattle. When deciding to raise farm animals, if you are looking to profit from them then you should expect to be in the black for at least five years. It's worth noting that many people earn a profit before this but it is always better to overestimate rather than underestimate. If you can afford to lose money on your investment for the first few years, then starting won't be such a struggle. But if you need to turn a profit immediately, it is best to avoid livestock.

Of course, many of us that get into backyard homesteading don't look at it as our primary source of income. Instead, it is a way of lowering the amount of money that we spend on our food. The initial investment is much higher than we might spend on food in a year, depending on which animals we decided to raise, but projected over a ten year period we see that the amount spent on food drops

drastically. The younger you can begin your backyard homestead, the more money you will save over the course of your life.

Stepping away from the financial side of things, raising your own livestock provides you with a ton of food to add variety to your dinner table. Cows provide beef and milk, the milk of which you can use to make cheese, yogurt, butter or a thousand different products. Goats provide meat and milk. Chickens provide eggs and meat. Bees offer honey, as well as beeswax which can be used to make a whole range of products as disparate as lip balm or mustache wax. This is only the most basic exploration of what these animals offer, too.

As mentioned previously, animal waste provides a source of free manure. Chicken feathers can actually be sold in bulk to people looking for craft making supplies. Bees can be rented out to farmers for help in their fields while leaving the honey for you to collect. Goats can even be rented out to serve as living lawnmowers. That's right, people legitimately hire goats to mow their lawns. Though to the goats it's not work, it's a free meal. When raising cattle, we can purchase a bull to breed our own and if that bull is strong enough then we can even rent him out to other farmers for breeding purposes. There are a lot of ways to profit from these animals, both on a monetary basis and on the basis of resources or materials.

If you are concerned about the high cost of getting into livestock farming, then I would suggest beginning first with your crops. These can quickly become profitable and this profit can be used to float the cost to get into livestock farming. From there, begin with chickens as they have the lowest starting cost of those animals which provide meat. Bees are also quite inexpensive to get started raising but they require a decent amount of space, as they like to be away from the general foot traffic of the backyard. Bees offer an interesting kind of livestock to raise, as they bolster their own numbers. We have to breed or purchase more animals when it comes to chickens, goats or cattle but a bee population will grow on its own if you allow it to. Together, chickens and bees offer the cheapest way into animal farming for the beginner.

We'll look at each of these wonderful creatures in more detail in the second half of this book. But for now, let us turn our attention towards vegetables, fruits and herbs.

Chapter Summary

- Backyard homesteading is all about having a self-sufficient life, a life in which you can grow your own food and provide sustenance for yourself and your family.
- Being self-sufficient doesn't mean ignoring the outside world. We still need to pay our bills and sell our wares.
- A lot of money can be made with a backyard homestead. It takes time to learn the skills and raise the livestock or plants through to harvesting or slaughtering but it can make a tidy profit.
- Growing vegetables, fruits, herbs and grains provide us with plenty of nutrients, as well as products to sell.
- Raising livestock is more expensive than growing plants but it provides a better window for higher profits, as well as protein and iron. Depending on the species in question you can even make a lot of money by renting them out.

In the next chapter, you will learn everything you need to know about starting your own home garden. From picking and preparing the space you'll grow your crops, through to maintenance and harvesting, we dive deep into the world of vegetable, fruit and herb gardening.

CHAPTER TWO

STARTING YOUR HOME GARDEN

Starting your own home garden isn't very hard. The most time-consuming part of the process will be the beginning. Some people have it in their minds that all it takes to grow a crop of vegetables is to drop some seeds in the ground and water them from time to time. Unfortunately, it isn't this easy.

When we are starting a garden, we need to consider the physical space we are growing in. The soil needs to be checked, the temperature needs to be watched and you should know exactly how much sun a given spot is going to be getting throughout the growing season. From there we then need to adjust the soil as necessary before we can begin to grow.

Growing itself is quite easy. It is important that we maintain our crops to keep them healthy but beyond that, growing vegetables, fruits or herbs is pretty much the same experience. We could look at each one of these separately as if they were their own thing but the growing experience doesn't change. Because of this, we will spend the majority of this chapter looking at this experience before we close out by taking a look at some of the more profitable crops which you can plant, as well as those that are the easier for beginners to get started with.

Preparing a Home Garden

Before you can grow a home garden, you need to make sure that the space provides the plants with everything they'll need. Different plants require different lighting needs. For example, tomatoes need six to eight hours of sunlight but lettuce often prefers to have ten to twelve hours of sunlight. Picking the perfect spot for your garden requires you to balance various needs such as these.

To pick a spot, keep an eye on how much sunlight it gets throughout the day. If you can check it yourself, it is often a good idea to go out to the spot once an hour to take the temperature there as well. Keeping track of how much sunlight and at what temperature a spot rests will give you a much better sense of control of your garden. You will be able to pick the perfect plants that will really thrive in a given space.

But the sunlight isn't the only issue at play here. Since plants grow in soil, it's pretty important to make sure that the soil is healthy. We do this by testing samples of it with a store-bought kit to keep the nutrient levels, to see what the pH level is and to identify any harmful substances that might be present. Soil

that doesn’t have enough nutrients or the right pH level can be altered easily enough but soil that has harmful substances present shouldn’t be used for gardening. Instead, you will either want to dig up the soil and replace it with a properly balanced soil such as you can find at any gardening center, or you will want to skip out on planting directly in the soil and instead use red garden beds for planting. We’ll be looking at these in more depth in a moment.

Assuming that the soil doesn’t have anything unhealthy in it, altering it can be quite easy. We can simply add some fertilizer or compost to increase the amount of nutrients present. Keep a pH level test kit on hand. If your pH level is too high then you add sulfur to the soil to lower it. If it is too low then you add limestone to raise it. Most plants want a pH level between 5.5 and 7.5. Anything about a pH level of 7.5 and the soil will be far too alkaline for the crops. Likewise, anything below 5.5 and you will find the soil to be too acidic. With that said, 5.5 and 7.5 are also pushing it at the extremes. For the best time growing, try to keep the pH level between 6.0 and 7.0.

Other concerns that you should take into consideration before planting is how much wind the space gets and how much protection it has from both the elements and the local wildlife. Oxygen is necessary for plants to survive. We try to use soil that isn’t overly compact. For one, this allows water to drain better but just as important is the way that it allows oxygen to get at the roots. A little bit of wind can be useful for your plants, especially considering it makes it harder for pests to infest them, but too much wind can cause damage and wreck a crop. Similarly, it is important to water your plants and so rain can be useful but too much water will drown a crop and so sometimes it is necessary for us to provide our crops with protection from the rain. Finally, as far as protection is concerned, we should try to keep our garden away from the teeth of passersby. Deer, rabbits, mice and other animals all enjoy nibbling away at your crops and so it is important that we keep them safe from critters by using fences, raised garden beds or other techniques that make it harder for hungry critters to get at them.

When you are picking a space for your garden, keep in mind that different vegetables, fruits and herbs have different requirements that need to be met. Some want full sun, some want partial. Some are very thirsty, some like it dry. Some like a higher pH level, some like a lower pH level. For the most part, you will find that many vegetables enjoy a pH level of 6.5 and this can make it easier to group them together. But each of these requirements must be considered when

you are grouping your plants. You wouldn't want to grow a plant that needs twelve hours of light in the same plot with one that requires only six to eight. You also would give that growing high pH plants alongside low pH plants will only lead to the death of one or both of these crops.

Getting your hands dirty is the best part of growing your own vegetables, fruits and herbs but it is important to take the time to plan out and prepare your garden first.

Raised Garden Beds

Raised garden beds are by far the best approach you can use to grow your garden. They will take a little bit more time and effort to set up when compared to just growing directly in the ground but they make up for it by being absolutely amazing. As the name suggests, these are garden beds that have been raised out of the ground. This is achieved by building a frame (typically wooden) that is then filled with healthy, balanced soil. Your seeds are planted in the raised bed and then the rest of the gardening experience plays out as normal. But the benefits that this approach offers are numerous.

Raised bed gardens allow us to start growing our crops earlier in the year compared to the ground. The raised height of these garden beds lets them warm up faster than the ground, so seeds can be planted in a raised bed garden before they could be planted in the ground. Another wonderful benefit is the fact that we have total control of the soil inside of the raised bed garden. We don't need to worry about harmful substances, so long as we make the bed properly. Some people have made raised garden beds out of old tires or old railway ties but these are horrible materials that should be avoided as they poison the soil around them. This means that they would poison both the soil inside of the raised bed and the soil upon which it rests. However, if we use proper materials then this isn't an issue.

When it comes to backyard homesteading, I can't recommend raised garden beds enough. They allow you to maximize your use of space. You can plant your crops closer together in a raised bed, you have fewer issues with critters and pests, you can start earlier but even cooler is the fact that you can actually design them in a ton of different ways. If you only have a thin space, you can create a long, thin raised bed. If you have a larger space, you can make it larger. If space is limited then you can even design them as a stack so that you have an elevated crop that rests above another crop. This will take some serious planning and woodworking skills to achieve, as this is a more complicated design but it is entirely achievable.

When designing your raised garden beds, keep in mind that they should be no wider than four feet. This is so you can reach every plant inside of the bed without issue. Any larger than this and you will have a harder time reaching those plants in the middle and this results in less care and attention being given them. When a plant receives less care, it makes it a risk for your garden. Disease or pests that infest this plant can go unnoticed for much longer. So while you can make your raised garden beds any length you want, don't go wider than four feet.

Raised garden beds will need a little bit of maintenance throughout the years, as the frames can crack and break and need to be replaced. However, this is made up for by the fact that the soil inside of them requires less work. Normally it is a bad idea to monocrop, which means to grow the same crop in the same field year after year. This depletes the nutrients from the soil and makes subsequent years harder to grow, often requiring strong chemical fertilizers to mitigate the negative effects. But the soil in a raised garden bed can

easily have its nutrients restored. After you harvest your crops and are preparing for the winter, simply add a layer of compost followed by a layer of mulch. The compost will break down over the winter months and replace those nutrients that had been spent throughout the growing season.

Raised bed gardens are by far the most effective way to grow your vegetables and make the most out of the space available to you. We'll turn our attention now to the process of planting and growing a crop, then look at which vegetables, fruits and herbs you should consider growing as a beginner to backyard homesteading.

Growing Vegetables, Fruits and Herbs

When you decide you are going to start growing your own garden, you need to also decide if you are going to sow your seeds directly into the soil or if you are going to start them indoors first. Many people swear by starting them indoors and they have a fairly decent argument. When you start seeds indoors you can start them earlier in the year, even earlier than you could sow them in a raised garden bed. It is important that we plant our garden after the last frost of the year, as many seeds will die if they are exposed to frost. Direct sowing requires us to wait for this frost to pass. Starting indoors we can begin our plants before this frost and then transition them outside almost immediately afterward. I say almost because it requires a week of preparation to harden off plants started inside but this still result in a three or four-week head start.

However, let us assume that you are going to sow your seeds directly. Those that are planted in the ground will need to be placed into rows and carefully positioned. But this extra work doesn't need to be done with a raised bed garden. Simply sow your seeds by spreading them out in the raised garden bed and letting them come up naturally. As the seedlings grow, you will want to trim them back and remove those that are weaker. But even as you do this, a raised bed garden allows you to grow your plants much closer together than normal.

When you spread out seeds, you need to check to see whether or not that particular type of seed needs to be covered with soil or left exposed to the sun. This will determine whether or not you can simply toss them out and water them or whether you need to spend a little more time making sure they're fully covered. Either way, finish planting seeds by watering them thoroughly.

As your seeds grow into seedlings, you will thin or remove them as

necessary but you can pretty much sit back for the time being. You will want to check on them once a day and stick a finger into the soil to see if the top two inches are dry or moist. If it is dry then the soil should fall from your finger when you pull it out. If it is moist then the soil will stick to your finger. Water according to the needs of the particular plants but don't overwater. Always wait for the top two inches to dry first. As a rule of thumb, it is a better idea to let your plants go a little dry compared to being overwatered. This is because overwatering can drown the plants, which in this case means that it causes the roots to start rotting and this can kill the plants quickly.

Maintaining your plants should be a daily activity. However, it doesn't need to be overly time-consuming. Take a few minutes every day to check on each of your plants. Bring a piece of tissue paper with you, too. Look at the leaves for signs of holes or discoloration. Rub the bottom of the leaves with the tissue paper and check the tissue for blood. These are signs of infestation. If your garden is infested with pests then you'll want to blast them with water, as this knocks them loose. It is also a good idea to spray neem oil on your plants once a week, as this doesn't hurt the plants at all but it makes them taste gross to pests that would normally love nothing more than an all you can eat garden buffet. Keep an eye out for fallen plant matter and remove it whenever you see it, as pests and disease like to breed in this discarded foliage.

Fertilize the plants as needed, typically using a once weekly or biweekly application of liquid fertilizer. Some gardeners prefer to use a physical fertilizer which they only need to apply every few months or sometimes once a season. I personally enjoy a liquid fertilizer because it is easy to slow down or ramp up fertilization based on the response of the plants.

If you maintain your garden this way, you will be ready for harvest in no time. Harvesting will be determined by the species of plant you are growing. Speaking of which, let us now turn our attention to those vegetables, fruits and herbs that beginners should consider starting with.

What Plants Beginners Should Grow

So far we've looked at how we grow the plants in our garden but we've yet to explore which plants make the best fit. The recommendations in this section are based on the ease with which these plants can be grown. Along with ease, I have also tried to incorporate a range of flavors and nutrients so that even beginners can have a delicious, varied and nutritious experience from their very

first harvest.

Herbs for Beginners

We're going to begin with herbs because they are among the easiest to grow. In fact, I have a hard time recommending any particular herb over the others for the sake of beginners. Herbs in general are pretty much the beginner crop. They are easier than fruits and vegetables, which makes them great for those without much experience. However, herbs should be used to accent a meal rather than replace one. So while herbs are recommended for beginners to get a sense of what it is like to grow your own garden, I still recommend that you pick either a fruit or a vegetable to grow in conjunction.

So which herbs should you start with? I am a big fan of rosemary. As far as plants go, rosemary should be considered almost a superfood. It is packed with so many nutrients as to be ridiculous. However, it is a little more temperamental than say sage. Growing sage simply requires you to plant it in a spot with plenty of sun and a quick-draining soil. Quick drainage, by the way, is one of the many benefits of raised garden beds. Another easy to grow herb is parsley. Those that plant parsley seeds directly might find that they don't really take. If this is the case, you might think that I am lying about how easy they are to grow. But the secret here is that you need to place the seeds in water before you go to bed. Let

them soak overnight and then plant them in the morning. With this little trick, you'll find that your parsley takes off much easier.

Among those herbs that are easy to grow, we couldn't finish this chapter with a discussion on mint. If you are new to gardening in general and feeling a little bit nervous, try starting with mint. It will want either full sun or partial shade, which is nice as it means you can plant it anywhere that isn't full shade. Growing mint from seeds is a more difficult experience, so I recommend purchasing seedlings from your garden center and planting these. Simply remove them from the soil in their container and transplant them into the soil of your garden bed. The reason that mint needs to be referenced here is the way that it spreads. Mint loves to spread and spread and spread. It is one of those crops that will replicate itself for you. This makes it easy for beginners to get massive yields but it can also lead to the herb choking out other plants if it is planted directly in the ground or in a raised bed alongside different species. Try growing mint in its own container for the best results.

Vegetables for Beginners

While herbs are almost uniformly easy to grow, vegetables demonstrate a great range of difficulty. Some vegetables are extremely easy to grow. For example, peas and pole beans simply require you to place a trellis for support. Water them two to three times a week and they will start to grow. You can begin harvesting them daily and continue to harvest them throughout the remainder of the season. They like the soil to be 60F before planting but they demand very little of the gardener.

Lettuce, spinach and salad greens like chard and kale are among the easiest crops for beginners to grow. While we are focusing on growing in soil, it should be noted that lettuce grows especially well in a hydroponic environment and they will actually show an increased size this way. With that being said, these salad greens are easy to grow. You could harvest them all at once but if you harvest them slowly and only take what you need at any one time then you can get away with only needing to plant them once. However, because salad greens do grow quite quickly, it is possible to plant and harvest two full crops in a growing season. You may even be able to fit a third full crop if you start your seeds indoors and get them into the ground immediately following the last frost of the season. Lettuce might prove a little difficult if the temperatures get too high, as this causes it to bolt. Bolting means that the lettuce grows a flower stalk and starts to seed. At this point, it is pretty useless, though there are some tricks that

can be used to get around this. But if you live in a temperate climate then you won't need to worry about bolting lettuce and should find the endeavor to be quite simple.

If you are looking to grow something more substantial then try peppers, eggplant or radishes. Each of these will be much more filling in your stomach and they will provide you with plenty of nutrients, especially if you combine them with some of the herbs that you've been growing. Radishes are a great crop to introduce you to under the soil veggies like potatoes, only they grow much faster. You could be harvesting them in as little as thirty days. Eggplant and peppers are a good way to begin growing the more complicated veggies while being easy enough that a beginner can manage them. Pick a smaller variety of eggplant (such as little finger) and stick to purple beauty or sweet chocolate peppers. These are sweeter peppers. If you want hot peppers then varieties for beginners include early jalapeno and Hungarian hot wax. Bell peppers will produce a veggie that looks more in line with what comes to your mind when you hear the word 'peppers' but they are going to be more difficult to grow. Start with an easier kind and work your way up as you feel more confident.

That last point is key and I want to take a moment to expand on it. Gardening is not a race but rather a practice in patience. When you grow anything, you need to understand that you are working on its timetable. It isn't working on yours. Your vegetables don't care if you have the last week of August booked off for a vacation, if that's when they're ready to harvest then that's when they'll be ready to harvest. Likewise, they take time to grow and you can't speed this up. Well, okay, you can but only by using chemical fertilizers which we absolutely should not be doing. So growing vegetables helps to teach you how to be patient and wait for harvest but there is another type of patience that we need to develop.

We must learn how to be patient with ourselves. Having taught people about farming and growing vegetables for years, there is a common experience which crops up again and again. Okay, you're right, I apologize for that pun. But that doesn't change the fact that new gardeners constantly throw themselves into the hardest crops. They decide to throw caution to the wind, typically with lines like "How hard could it really be?" But the truth is that it can be quite hard. Beginners don't realize the work that goes into maintaining a difficult crop. They read online about the temperature it needs and how often to water it and think that's all there is to it. Unfortunately, this isn't really the case.

Begin with an easier crop and get a sense of how vegetables grow. Bring an easy crop from seed to harvest. Experience the struggles you have along the way and remember that they are learning experiences. The more you get used to growing these easier crops, the better you are getting at growing any crop. In your first year, stick simple. In fact, you might even want to stick with simple crops in your second year, too. But once you get hands-on experience growing and harvesting, you will be much better prepared for the struggles of a harder crop.

By demonstrating patience, you won't burn out on farming the way that others have. Considering that growing your own food is a wonderful gift, I truly hope you will heed this advice and stick around.

Fruits for Beginners

Growing fruit is typically more difficult when compared to vegetables but only a little. The issue with growing fruits is that the scale of difficulty covers a wide range. Some fruits are remarkably difficult while others are no harder than growing some peppers. But you can grow some delicious fruits in a small space

and enjoy yourself some natural, sugary treats in no time.

Among the easiest fruits to grow is the most widely beloved: Strawberries. Strawberries can be grown in the ground if you want but they also do well in hanging baskets. This is great because it makes it easier to maximize your available space. They love getting lots and lots of sunshine, too. If you're clever, you might be able to see how these two factors can play to your advantage. Try using hanging pots to grow strawberries so that they are in a heightened position where they get better sun. You'll notice that the pot casts a shadow and creates a patch of shade. Creatively positioned hanging pots can be used to turn an area that gets full sun into one that gets partial shade, completely changing the plants that are appropriate to grow in that space. This is perfect if you don't have a lot of coverage from foliage in your backyard.

Raspberries can be grown in containers if you have to but they will benefit from being planted in a raised bed. Unlike most vegetable crops, raspberries can be planted once but they will continue to grow year after year with a little bit of maintenance. Harvest raspberries when they are ripe and remove the branches that fruited. The remaining branches will then fruit the following year. Just repeat this each year to keep the plants healthy and productive. They'll want to be placed in the sun but even more important is their need for a quick-draining soil, which is why they are so well suited to raised bed gardens.

Blueberries and blackberries go well together because they both enjoy soil that is moist and acidic. People tend to grow blueberries in containers rather than raised beds mostly due to the length it takes them to grow. If growing from seed you can expect to take roughly three years before the plants are ready to start producing fruit. Just remember to keep an idea of the acidity of the soil, as it can be difficult to spot problems with the plants during the early stages. Often people won't realize the soil was problematic until there is a problem with the fruit. Blackberries are such a hardy plant that they can grow pretty much anywhere and they don't take up a lot of attention. If you have a spot in your garden that nothing else will grow, try planting some blackberries there. They take about a year to be ready to produce fruit, so you will know if there is an issue with the plants far sooner than you do with blueberries. But if you are planting a fruit garden then blackberries will be perfectly at home in a container or a raised bed so long as the soil remains acidic enough for them.

These four berries will make a great introduction to many of the challenges of growing your own fruits but you should also try starting with a tree. Oranges,

lemons, limes, cherries and apples are all produced by a tree rather than a bush. Of these, apples are the most appropriate for a beginner. There are a ton of types but try a family apple tree. These can be purchased as dwarves if you are looking to conserve space. Dwarf trees can be grown in containers but full-sized trees should be planted directly into the ground. Skip the raised bed this time. I recommend a family apple tree because this species produces three different types of apple, which makes it perfect for those looking to maximize both their use of space and the flavors they can enjoy and bake with. Make sure that the soil is quick-draining and that the tree will get full sun. During the growing season, you will need to water it and pick fruit but otherwise, you can leave it be. You will want to prune it during winter, as this promotes more growth come spring, and you will need to pollinate the apple blossoms in spring. If you have enough space for two apple trees, you can purchase two different types and they will pollinate each other for you. This makes it much easier to grow because it reduces the amount of work you need to put in. However, if you grow bees on your homestead then you don’t even need to do this much. For more about how bees help us to grow fruits and vegetables stick around for chapter eight.

Chapter Summary

- To start your own home garden you need to first set aside space for your plant beds.
- How much sun a spot gets is one of the most important features but you should also pay attention to how much shade it receives, how the wind affects it, if critters can get to it easily, whether or not it will be in the way of foot traffic and the elevation of the section.
- Soil must be tested before planting. Most of the time it is in your best interest to use raised garden beds and freshly balanced soil to grow your plants. These beds make it easier to grow plants and they will even give you a head start on the season each spring.
- Remember that different species of vegetables and fruits have different requirements in regards to pH level, watering and sun. Always research your plants first to ensure that they are grouped together in a way that won't harm them.
- Growing your own food is one of the best experiences you can have. Whether you sow seeds directly into the soil or start them inside is up to you but both have their pros and cons.
- Seeds grow into seedlings and you will be required to thin these out. This involves removing seedlings so that only the strongest are left alive to get the most nutrients.
- Fertilize plants on a weekly or biweekly basis. It is a smart idea to stick to a liquid fertilizer which allows you to take total control of their nutrients.
- Herbs are super easy to grow. Despite this, they are actually also super nutrient-dense.
- Vegetables are a little harder to grow but some easy veggies to start with are lettuce and salad greens, peppers, eggplants and radishes.
- Growing vegetables takes time to learn because you can only do so much each season. Take your time and start slow.

- Fruits are harder to grow for the most part but some easy fruits include strawberries, blueberries, blackberries and raspberries. If you want to try your hand at growing fruit from a tree then start with apples.

In the next chapter, you will learn how to grow grains on your homestead. Used to make cereals, breads and flour, these intriguing plants aren't particularly hard to grow and even a small crop can produce a large yield. However, harvesting and preparing them takes quite a bit more work when compared to their vegetable cousins. From sowing seeds to milling the harvest, the next chapter covers everything you need to start growing your own grains.

CHAPTER THREE

GROWING GRAINS ON YOUR HOMESTEAD

Grains make up a huge part of our diets. From wheat to barley, rice to rye, and oats to buckwheat, there are a lot of grains in the foods that we eat. Yet growing grains doesn't seem to come up in conversations about backyard homesteading or mini-farming. This should be considered an oversight but in a way, it is representative of how widespread the myths surrounding grain cultivation are.

One of the biggest misconceptions around grain farming is that it takes tons and tons of space to get even the smallest yield. People think that grain takes thousands of feet, acre upon acre. But you can grow more than sixty pounds

worth of grain in as small as a thousand square feet. It is fair to say that this takes up a lot of space if all you have is a small backyard, as the average size is about a thousand feet squared. However, nothing says that you need to grow this amount. If you have a smaller backyard then you may want to use half or a quarter to grow grains while using the rest for fruits and vegetables. If you have a larger backyard then fitting in some grains can be a great idea.

Growing your own grains allows you to make your own flour or cereals. This is a fantastic way to cut back on the groceries you pick up. You can take control of your own baking needs rather than relying on anyone else. I might not have considered growing grains to be such an important part of a backyard homestead until recently. With so many people staying at home this year, the local stores quickly ran out of flour because everyone was baking lots of goodies and trying out new recipes. This shortage saw a drastic change in the diets of my friends and family but thankfully I can expect a harvest in the near future and this will help me to provide homegrown flours to them. So while growing grains is great for saving money, the way it enables you to separate yourself from the grocery stores' chain of supply and demand is even better.

This ties into the second widespread misconception around growing your own grains, though only indirectly. It seems that people have it in their minds that growing grains requires a large investment in equipment and specialized machinery. How this misconception came to be is rather confusing. I assume that it has to do with the widespread imagery of farm equipment harvesting wheat and other grains, though this is an assumption and I can't guarantee it to be the truth. Historically, grains have been harvested with scythes for generations. Or you can use a pair of shears. To harvest grains, we cut down the stalk but then we need to thresh it, which is simply the term we use for removing the individual grains from the seedheads. This is achieved by simply whacking the stalks with a stick until they all come off. The grain then needs to go through a process known as winnowing to remove the chaff. This is done with a fan but it doesn't need to be a specialized fan, a $10 fan from your local Walmart will get the job done. Finally, a blender can be used in the place of a mill to convert the grains into flour. If you bought each item purposefully for their use in growing grains, you are looking at around $50 with the most expensive items being the blender and the fan. Note, the two most expensive items are also the two that can be used for countless other activities around the house and they are also the equipment that people are most likely to own already.

So growing grain take up less space than people think and it costs less than people assume it will. If you want to have a backyard homestead that meets all of your needs, growing grains is an absolute necessity. We'll look at how to grow grains in a general sense since they do really follow in each other's footsteps. From there we'll turn our attention over to the needs of specific grains and how to harvest and prepare them.

How to Grow Grains

Growing your own grains is surprisingly simple. However, there will always be unique challenges that arise based on the species of plant in question. Growing wheat will be a little bit different from growing oats and so on. Yet the process is primarily the same. In this section we are going to look at this process so that we can see what it is to take grain from seed to harvest. Afterward, we will look at individual grains to get a better understanding of how they differ. This is primarily due to factors such as how much to water them or how long they take to grow, when to plant them. These should be considered addendums to this simplified process.

To begin with, we need to pick out our seeds. These are simple enough to find. Your local garden center should have plenty and if they don't then you can always find them online. While they should be rather inexpensive, the cost is going to be determined by the species in question and the amount you need to purchase for your backyard homestead. If you are only growing a small patch then you only need a small order, though you always want to purchase and sow more seeds than you expect to harvest. Keep in mind that not grains are planted at the same time. Speaking only of wheat, there are both winter and spring varieties that are planted in autumn or spring, respectively. Since you can't expect to plant different types of one plant at the same time, it would be ridiculous to think that what works for one species also does for another. Make sure that you check the seeds you are planning to buy to make sure that they are appropriate for the season you are planting.

Even among just winter wheats alone, there is a distinction between soft and hard varieties. A softer wheat has a small amount of gluten that makes them appropriate for those who have a sensitivity. Hard wheats have a high gluten content and are more regularly used for breads and pastas. Picking between hard and soft varieties of grains shouldn't have a large impact on growing them, it's more important when it comes to using and consuming them. I recommend sticking with a soft grain whenever possible, as the lower levels of gluten will

make it easier to cook for and gift food to friends and family. However, this is primarily a judgment for your taste buds rather than any difficulty you'll have growing them as a beginner.

Assuming that you have purchased the right seeds, you will be planting either in spring or autumn. While it is extremely important to get the time of planting right, the actual act thereof is much the same. We judge the right time to plant-based on the weather. With spring-planted seeds we want them in the ground after the last frost of the winter season. Autumn seeds are planted just before the first frost. This results in a harvesting season either in the middle of May or in the autumn just before that frost hits.

Before you can plant the seeds you need to test the soil. I recommend getting a kit and seeing if there are any heavy metals or harmful chemicals in the soil. If there are, it doesn't necessarily mean that you can't use that spot but rather it tells us that we need to prepare it first. We do this by digging up a couple feet of the soil, laying down some tarps and then filling it back in with healthy soil that we purchased or made ourselves. For beginners, I recommend purchasing a pre-made soil that is already rich in nutrients. If you are using your own or a soil that hasn't been mixed then you should add some compost to it to boost the nutrients present. Keep in mind that we shouldn't just get soil from the Earth directly and expect this to be fine. Proper gardening soil is treated beforehand to kill off any harmful microorganisms present and this goes beyond the scope of our discussion. So stick with a store-bought soil and add compost if it hasn't been mixed in already. You should still use a properly formulated soil for growing your grains even if your test didn't reveal any harmful chemicals but you can skip the tarp.

Fill in the garden bed with the soil. While some crops will have you creating little hills of soil, such as we do with potatoes for example, grains grow best when the field is even. You don't need to worry if there is a slight lean to the soil or if it isn't perfectly leveled. So long as it is mostly even or appears to be then it will be fine. This is done to create the best possible growing environment we can but mother nature is never perfectly even herself. Rake the soil or pat it down with your shovel until it looks to be even and then check this step off your to-do list.

With the soil ready, it is now time to get sowing your grain seeds. Sprinkle the seeds liberally. We do this for two reasons. The first is a fact shared across all plants, a universal truth when it comes to our green friends. Just because you have a seed, that doesn't guarantee it will grow. Some seeds are sterile. While we don't have a good way of testing our grain seeds this way, harder seeds that need to go through a soaking process demonstrate this fact quite clearly. Seeds that are soaked in water before planting should sink to the bottom of the liquid after a little while. Those that continue to float are sterile and tossed out. Unfortunately, we can't run a test like this so we must sow our seeds with the assumption that a good number of them will simply not germinate.

The other thing that grains have going for them is that they can and do grow much closer together than our vegetables will. When we plant our vegetables, we follow one of two paths. The first is to carefully position them and then sow three or four seeds in each location where we have planned for the grown plant to be. The other technique, which we discussed in relation to raised garden beds, is to sow the seeds at will and let them land where they want. Regardless of which of these we followed, there is a second step during the seedling stage of our plants' life cycle. With vegetable crops, we thin out the seedlings by

removing those that appear to be weaker. This allows the stronger seedlings to get better access to the nutrients in the soil since they are no longer competing for them. But with our grains, we like to grow them especially close together. So when we sow our seeds, we are expecting them to grow together as tightly as blades of grass do. This is useful for maximizing our space, something which we will continue to address and aim to achieve throughout the book.

Once you have sown the seeds, take your rake and use it to lightly till the soil. There is no need to build up the soil into mounds of any sort, so don't go crazy with the rake. Simply go through and use it to cover up the seeds. Water then thoroughly. This is extremely important but we'll discuss watering more in just a minute. First, we must talk a little more about covering our seeds. We rake the soil to cover them that way but this isn't enough. During this stage in their life, the seeds are extremely vulnerable. There are many different species of birds that feed on seeds and they would love nothing more than to have a free meal. If you don't protect your seeds, then you shouldn't be surprised when they are eaten. The problem here is that you want to protect them in such a way that still lets them soak up the sunshine. If you can get a mesh tarp or tent then this will do the trick. The holes in the mesh will allow plenty of sunlight in while preventing birds from getting easy access. It isn't foolproof, determined birds can learn how to get under it or just straight up chew their way through, but it will take care of 99% of the issue. Really can't ask for much more than that.

When it comes to watering, the species you are growing are going to determine whether they need a lot of water or a little. But pretty much every grain likes to get lots of water while they are trying to germinate. Water seeds once a day to ensure that there is enough moisture in the soil to support them. It is best to do this earlier in the day, before noon if you can. This gives the water enough time to evaporate before the night. This isn't as important with grain seeds as it is with vegetables and fruit but it is always a good idea to build a habit of only watering your plants before noon. This simple habit shouldn't be too hard to integrate into your life and it should keep your garden from suffering from root rot and other harmful issues that arise from overwatering.

As your grain grows, it will start to come into its color and you will notice that it gets much heavier. This weight is due to the grains coming in. Since the grain grows on the head of the stalk, you should notice that they begin to bend down a bit. This tells you that it is time to harvest, or at least that it is extremely close to time to harvest.

We'll talk about harvesting in just a moment, first, let's take a look at a few grains to get a sense of their own unique and specific needs.

Grains for Beginners

Of those that are recommended for beginners, the easiest is wheat. In fact, the guide above can be taken as-is for wheat. You will want to water your wheat three times a week after it leaves the seed phase of its life cycle. But other than this, just follow the previous guidelines and you'll be enjoying wheat in no time. Whether you plant in the spring or the autumn is determined by the type of wheat you choose.

Rye is similar to wheat, though you want to make sure that you pack it in tightly. Instead of just using a rake to till the soil after sowing, it is recommended that you then pack the soil. This is done to ensure the maximum amount of contact between the seed and the soil, something that is needed to properly germinate. Rye is grown in the autumn, with the window for planting being a fair bit larger than other plants. While it is a good idea to plant rye a couple of weeks before the first frost, you can get away with planting it up to a month after as well. In fact, while these dates make for the best crop, you can get away with planting pretty much anywhere from August to March. The stuff is very hard to kill, though out of season planting does reduce the flavor. Rye enjoys wet soil and if the winter is mild then it will grow quite quickly. Quick growing rye is cut to maintain an even height but rye in poor soil or a harsh winter can be left to grow on its own, simply water it and harvest it at the appropriate time.

Oats are another staple grain and, while they prove a little harder than wheat and rye, they are a good fit for beginners. Oats like quick-draining soil and they yield the largest amounts of product when they're planted around mid-May. Unlike wheat, oats should be grown in rows that are between half a foot to a foot apart from each other. Oats are particular about the amount of nitrogen in their soil. Too much nitrogen and too little nitrogen both cause issues with the harvest. The more water present, the more nitrogen is needed. The biggest issue that oats tend to have is a deficiency of manganese, one of the micronutrients which plants require to thrive. Oats are a great crop if you find that you are having issues with pests. Most insects don't want to eat oats and so they work well as a crop you can ensure will make it to the harvest. Wait until the hulls have turned from green to tan before harvesting. The youngest kernels on each piece should be a cream color. Harvest when these conditions are met, as leaving

them to mature too long will result in a lower quality yield, as well as increase the chances that a storm or strong wind breaks the stems and reduces the size of the yield alongside the quality.

How to Harvest, Process and Store Grains

Grains mature quickly. Some go from seed to harvest in as little as a month. You should know how to harvest them before you plant them, as it is easy to put off learning until it's too late and they've been left in the ground for too long. But harvesting grains follows the same pattern of being quite simple.

Watch the stalks as they change color. They'll go from green to brown. When they do, you know it is time to start harvesting. Grab your scythe or whatever cutting tool you are comfortable using and start bringing them down. Make your cuts just above the ground, about an inch up on the stalk.

When you have enough stalks cut down to make a bundle, tie them together. You don't need to use a thick rope, some twine should do the trick. For the next two weeks you will want to keep them out of the rain so that they can dry. You can toss them on a floor in your shed or you can hang wire and attach them to it. Many people prefer this latter technique because it elevates the stalks so that gravity can help them to dry out by pulling the moisture down. Hanging them also prevents them from being laid in a puddle of water on the floor. It is unlikely that the stalks contained enough moisture to form puddles, it is not impossible.

It takes roughly two weeks for grains to dry out. You will be able to tell when it is ready by its texture. The grains should be hard to the touch. Pop one in your mouth and chew it. If it is crunchy then you know it is ready for the next step.

Lay down a tarp or some other fabric. This is laid out to catch all of the debris that we'll be creating. Toss a bundle of grains onto the tarp, grab a stick (or a dowel or a light hammer, pretty much anything you can use as a blunt weapon) and start whacking away at them. This is the threshing stage. We abuse our grain stalks to knock the grains off of them. Once a stalk has released all of its grains, you can toss it into your compost pile. Collect the grains in between each bundle.

Alongside the bucket or container you use to scoop up the freshly threshed grains, you are also going to need a second container and a rotary fan. Place the fan on a medium breeze and point it at your second (empty) container. Take a handful of grains and drop it into the container, making sure that you hold them high enough that the breeze can catch them as they drop. Grains have a paper-like layer on them that we call the chaff. You could eat it if you wanted to but it wouldn't be very tasty. It's meant to protect the grains and so we no longer need it at this stage. Since this layer is extremely light in weight, the fan should be powerful enough to blow it away. After dropping the first couple handfuls, check the grains in the second container to see if the chaff is still attached. If it is then the fan should be set a little higher. The removal of grain chaff is referred to as winnowing.

The grain is ready to be stored once the chaff has been removed. Use glass jars and store them in a cool dark place. Exposing the grain to light can promote the growth of molds and fungus. If you notice any discoloration in your grains, or if you spot a substance that looks out of place, then your best bet is to toss that jar. Chances are it either wasn't sealed properly, it was stored in too warm of a place or it was exposed to direct sunlight.

There is one step left for your grain and that is to mill it. This used to be done in mills that needed to be manually worked. This was achieved both by human labor and by animal labor. As technology advanced, systems were designed for automated mills that used water or wind in place of labor. Nowadays we don't even need to worry about that. Just toss your grains into a blender and give them a good beating. Make sure that the blender is made to withstand heavier objects, as weaker glass blenders can be broken this way. Whenever you need to mill grain for some flower or the likes, just open up your jar and toss some in. For wheat and rye this will be the last step but if you are looking to mill rice or oats then there is actually one more step.

Oats, rice and buckwheat are just a couple of the grains which can't be milled right away. They have a hard hull. This is like a skin on the outside of the grain, only it can be extremely tough and so it needs to be removed before milling. One technique is to put these grains into a blender and give them a quick beating. This isn't enough to mill them but it can break open the hull. Some grains will naturally separate from the hull this way but others will crack and then need to be removed by hand. If you purchase an at-home grain mill, a specialized appliance that should replace your blender if you get one, then you should be able to get an attachment which will break the hulls for you. Some kitchen counter mills will even come with the feature as a selling point.

And there you go. From seed to harvest, threshing and winnowing, all the way to cracking the hulls and blending your grains, you now have what it takes to grow grain as a part of your backyard homestead. I highly recommend that you give it a try and see just how satisfying it is to bake a loaf of bread from ingredients that you've grown yourself.

Chapter Summary

- Grains are a great crop to grow for cereals and flours. They can be stored for a fairly decent length of time, they don't take up very much space and they grow quickly.
- Plus you can always sell them, though they won't earn as much as a crop of veggies or fruits will.
- There is an idea that growing grain takes a lot of expensive equipment but this simply isn't true. A knife and a stick are all you need to process your grains.
- Grains are grown from seed, which is typically sowed quite liberally in an area. Many grains can be grown in tight clusters compared to vegetables or fruits. They're more in line with herbs this way.
- There are winter and spring varieties of most grains that are sown in May or September. They also come in hard and soft varieties with hard grains having a much higher gluten content than soft grains do.
- Water your grains based on the needs of the species in question, this will require you to do some light Googling.
- Grain will start to change color from green to yellow and the tops will get heavier, causing a slight lean, this tells you it is time to harvest.
- Beginners should try starting with a species of wheat, rye or oats. Wheat is the easiest of the three but it is quite versatile.
- Grains are harvested when they have changed color and show a lean. They are cut with a sickle and then left to dry.
- Dried grains are then beaten with a stick to knock them off the shaft.
- A fan is turned on and grains and dropped in front of it to have the chaff blown off.
- You can then store or mill your grains, though some grains need to have their hull cracked before they can be milled.

In the next chapter, you will learn how to set up your own barn. Whether you need to make one from scratch, convert an existing shed or purchase a prefabricated shed to use as a barn, you can find out how next.

CHAPTER FOUR

SETTING UP YOUR BARN

This chapter could be thought of as the bridge between the first and the second section of this book. So far we have spent our time exploring the horticultural side of mini-farming. We've grown vegetables, fruits, herbs and grains. We're now going to move into raising our own animals for meat, eggs, milk, soap, fiber and honey. But raising your own livestock is going to take a lot more work than planting a garden does. Specifically, raising your own livestock requires a much greater initial investment.

This investment needs to cover quite a few costs. There is the cost of the animals themselves but that is only the beginning. We need to be able to provide them with food, water and shelter. A fence must be erected to keep them from wandering all across the countryside. A fence will also offer a level of protection from predators. Each of these steps requires money, time or effort, and some of them need all three.

In this chapter, we are going to tackle the biggest of their needs: the barn. But we won't just look at a barn as something that exists in a vacuum. We'll also consider how the barn's placement directly affects the placement of the fence. These two objects should be considered inseparable from each other.

We're going to look at setting up a barn from two different angles. The first angle is how to build your own barn. As you'll soon see, this is an extremely time-consuming process that requires an understanding of carpentry and architecture. This option will give you the largest sense of control of your barn but it takes a long time and it can end up costing you a lot of money. The other angle we'll approach this topic from is the converting of a shed into a barn. Specifically, we'll look at how to convert a prefabricated shed into a barn. If you already have a shed then you should be able to apply the same techniques to your shed as we will to the prefabricated one in our discussion. With our barn settled and out of the way, the remaining chapters will deal with raising livestock and the different commodities they produce.

Building Your Own Barn

There are three stages to building a barn, each with a number of steps that must be followed. In no way should this process be considered easy, even if many internet blogs claim that it is. Rather, it should be acknowledged upfront that it can be quite difficult. But it is not impossible. It will take time and effort but it is absolutely possible. If you have carpentry skills then it will be easier for you than someone without, though you could always hire a professional to help you out.

The three stages of barn construction are to choose a location, build a foundation and, finally, to build the barn itself. These could be thought of as planning, preparation and actualization. Typically, when it comes to mini-farming, planning is the longest step in any process but here it will be the shortest. There is a lot of labor that goes into building a barn and this only becomes clear in the second and third stages. Before you undergo construction,

consider your own physical health for a minute. Are you going to be able to dig, pour, hammer and raise the sides of a barn? If you have medical conditions that prohibit strenuous work then your best bet is to convert a prefabricated shed like we'll be outlining shortly.

If you are in good enough health to continue then it is time for step one. Unfortunately, this is a pretty boring step but a necessary one. If you want to build a barn, you must first find out if you are even allowed to. This means you need to find the building codes for your local area. If you are in the United States then this can be found on the government's Codes Enforcement website. Those in other countries will need to find these for themselves but nearly every first and second world country has them listed online at this point. If you Google "Building codes" plus your local area, they should come up as the first or second link. These codes are going to be a slog to read through but they will let you know everything you need to start building. If you need to get government permission to erect a barn, what size is acceptable, what regulations need to be followed for plumbing or electrical wiring, all of these and more will be listed in these codes. Make sure that you follow them to a tee, otherwise, you can end up on the wrong side of a legal battle that will quickly dash your dreams of having your own backyard homestead.

Once you know the legality of your barn, it is time to start picking the space. The right space will depend on several factors: the ground it is laid on; the patterns of the wind; the amount of sun and shade; and how much space you have available in the first place. Each of these has a preferred state but it is hard to find a spot that is perfect for all of them. As you read this guide, take into consideration which features are absolute necessities for you and which you can get around. With a little creativity, you should be able to make your new barn work fantastic even if you have issues with the wind or the sun.

The ground you choose will be the most important piece of the puzzle to get correct. You want the ground to be level, with a densely packed Earth rather than an overly sandy structure. Rainy areas will benefit from fast-draining soil but too much sand or too much gravel will result in a weaker foundation. While it must be flat, try to avoid picking a spot that is at the bottom of a hill. Water will flow down the hill when it rains and this can lead to unexpected flooding. When picking this spot, remember that you need to set aside space for two different buildings, in a way. The first is the barn itself. This definitely requires flat, secure land. But you also need to consider the fence and the size of the pasture

the barn will open into. You want your animals to have enough space to stretch their legs, for one, but you also should have a section for feeding, a section for relaxation and a section for breeding (if you are going to breed your own animals, which I recommend). The pasture that this fence outlines doesn't need to stand up to the same rigorous demands as the space where your barn will rest.

Pay attention to the wind patterns. If you can, you are going to want to situate your new barn downwind from your house. This is done to avoid carrying the smell of manure and animals into your home. Some places will find that the wind seems to come from all directions. This makes it hard to pick the perfect spot but if you design your barn with doors on all sides then it will give you the ability to control the ventilation and reduce the smells around the house. Similarly, you should also pay attention to the sun. The best placement will have partial sun, preferably with the shade being cast on the spot around noon when the temperatures would be the highest. This will help to prevent issues in your animals such as heatstroke. With these taken into consideration, you should have your spot.

The next stage is to get the foundation down. We do this by first excavating the site where the barn will be. We dig up roughly half a foot of dirt in the shape and size that the final building is going to be. As this is a rather large dig, you will find that it works best with an excavator or even a bulldozer if you can afford to hire or rent one. Place all of the soil you've dug up off to the side, it will prove useful if you ever take on other landscaping tasks. You can even make a little bit of money off of it by selling it to others. While you're doing this digging, make sure to keep an eye out for rocks and roots. You'll want to remove these now so they don't weaken the foundation in the future.

The next step is more digging. But this time we dig a trench around the perimeter. The depth and width of this trench will be determined by your local building codes. This hole is called the footer trench and we will be filling it with rebar. The goal is to use the rebar to create support and tension against the sides of the trench. Do this the whole way around. This will result in a skeletal-like appearance. We then fill in the trench with crushed stones. These can be purchased wholesale or bought at your local hardware store in weighted bags. Fill in the trench so that the stones leave only half a foot to a foot of space from the top of the hole. Use a shovel to even out the stones. The flatter you can make the surface of these rocks, the better.

Once your rocks are in place, it is time to fill the trench with concrete. You want this concrete to completely fill the trench, leaving only a few inches from the top. Again, we want to try to create an even surface with this. After your first pour it will take roughly three days for it to harden fully. When it has taken some more of your rebar and places it along the perimeter. This will offer more support for our next pour, which we will undergo now. We don't need to bother adding more stones this time around, so simply pour the new concrete up to the top of the trench. This also takes three days to set. After the trench is complete, lay down some wire mesh to the dimensions the building will be and then pour half a foot of concrete. This will fill the hole you originally excavated. All together you now have a perimeter of solid concrete which is firmly held in place by the Earth itself and you have concrete flooring to serve as your foundation.

Take note that concrete flooring is quite uncomfortable for your animals' feet. You will need to make sure to lay down mats and hay. Pretty much anything you can do to soften the experience for your animals will result in healthier and happier livestock.

Finally, it is time to build the structure itself. This is done by first constructing a stick frame. This is a frame made from 2 by 6 studs that outlines the walls. This is then followed by a frame for the roof. This can be flat or sloped. Which is right for your barn will depend on what you think looks best and what the weather's like in your area. If you are in an area that gets lots of rain then a sloped roof is best because it prevents water from pooling up. This may sound like a minor concern but water does have a weight and too much of it will damage the integrity of the roof.

With the shape of the barn in place, next you will want to install the roof itself. Lay down half an inch of plywood. This is then followed by some roofing felt and finally by some metal sheeting. The walls come next. Your best bet is to go with a pre-cut wood siding such a board & batten siding. These can be purchased in your required dimensions to save time cutting and sawing. All you need to do is nail them securely into place. Remember to leave enough space for a couple of sliding doors. You may also want to cut out holes for a couple of windows to improve airflow. Make sure to attach shutters so you can close the windows up during storms, or the barn will get too wet and it will be impossible to keep it properly heated.

There you have it, a step by step guide to making your own barn. You'll want to divide up the inside into stables but these will be determined by what type of livestock you decide to raise. If you have limited space for your pasture, consider setting aside a space inside of the barn for feeding. Make sure to include plenty of hay for bedding, too. At first, you will probably find that the barn is rather empty and plain. As you get more involved with your animals, you will get a sense of what tools you need and how you can best support them. Within a matter of a couple years, your new barn will go from feeling empty to feeling full of life and thoroughly lived in and this is one of the coolest things you can ever experience.

But building a barn isn't for everyone. It can be quite tiring and it can take quite a long time, too. The benefit of building your own barn is the level of security you give the structure through the concrete foundation and the way it lets you fully take control of its dimensions. But if you are looking for a quicker, easier way to get started with a barn of your own then you'll want to stick to prefabricated buildings. Let's turn now to see what this entails.

Converting a Prefabricated Shed into a Barn

Most sheds are going to be too small to house cattle. Cows take up a lot of space and unless you only have one or two, you will need to build your own barn or to string together several prefabricated sheds. But turning a shed into a barn for goats is quite easy and the sizes work out far better. Don't take this to mean that you can't turn a shed into a cattle barn, just that it is far less likely and requires far more work to do so. For cattle, you are best sticking to the previous guide on constructing your own. Also, as mentioned previously, this section is primarily concerned with prefabricated sheds but it works for converting an already existing shed into a barn. The focus on prefabricated sheds is simply to show that those without a shed can still easily get one set in place and prepared for their animals.

A prefabricated shed is a great choice for those that want a simple time making their barn. Seek out a local retailer and purchase from them. They should have some that are immediately ready to be placed but most retailers allow you to pick from an array of styles, sizes, colors and the like. Going with an already prepared one will get you a barn quicker but you will be stuck having to settle for what is available. But you shouldn't be in a rush at this stage. After all, we haven't purchased any animals yet because we don't have a space dedicated for

them. Spending a couple of weeks to get a prefabricated shed that best fits your needs should be a breeze. I full-heartedly recommend having patience and perfecting your shed rather than rushing into a purchase. Remember, too, that zoning laws should be consulted before purchase.

Prefabricated sheds don't require you to construct a concrete foundation. However, you do still want to create some sort of foundation. Crushed stone is the best choice as it will help to improve the drainage. In the long run, this will reduce the amount of water damage and create a much more secure placement. Dig a hole that matches the specifications of your prefabricated shed. This only needs to be two or three inches deep. Once it is dug, fill it back in with crushed stone. There you go, that's all it takes for the foundation of a prefabricated building. You shouldn't need to worry about attaching doors or windows or anything of the like. These can all be given to the manufacturer who will put them in place for you.

Guess what? The shed will be delivered to you and often the company will even set it up where you specify. This means that the outside aspects of your shed are handled. Now you will need to fill the inside up. How you divide the space will be determined by how many animals you own and what you are looking to do with them. You might use a part of the shed as a milking station while you place stables and lay hay on the other side. Whatever you do, you should aim to have a plan in place before purchase. Since the purchasing and laying of your prefabricated shed are as easy as contacting the manufacturer, let us turn our attention from building over to the layout.

Start by figuring out how much space you need in your barn. List all of the animals you will be raising in it, how much equipment you need to store, how much space you need for milking or birthing or whatever else you plan to do. Once you have this in place, take a ruler and a piece of paper and start designing a mock-up of your barn. If you are in doubt about the size of any particular component, always settle on estimating it will be larger and take up more space than you think it will in reality. It is always, always better to have more space than you need. More space allows you to grow, too little space cripples your aspirations. Keep in mind that the manufacturer will have an upper limit on the size of the building. You should use this as a guide for the maximum amount of space you can allocate in your mock-up.

Some features which you will want to consider are haylofts, sliding doors, overhangs and pressure-treated floors. A hayloft gives you a place to store hay

so it doesn’t get in the way and it is easy to add to a shed whether or not the manufacturer includes them as an option. Sliding doors are pretty self-explanatory. You don’t necessarily need them, as swinging doors with a wide arc will suffice but sliding doors are the easiest to open and close quickly since the door stays against the side of the barn. Overhangs in front of the doors are smart additions because they offer better shelter from rain and snow. While most manufacturers will have overhang options, they are extremely easy to build yourself. Finally, pressure-treated floors may have fewer issues with rotting but there is some debate as to whether or not they expose the livestock to harmful or toxic chemicals. Whenever there is a debate of this type it is best to avoid the feature. By avoiding the feature, you avoid the risk entirely.

If you are raising goats then there is one other feature that you will want to add yourself. As cute as they are, goats just love smashing things with their heads. Each other, fence posts and even the walls of their barn. If you let them bash the walls long enough then they will eventually break them. Reinforce the walls by adding a few sheets of plywood to the inside and you may even want to consider adding some padding to the plywood to make your goats’ headaches a little kinder. This will also serve as insulation to help your animals stay warm during the colder months.

A prefabricated shed won’t come with electricity or plumbing so you will need to install these yourself if you must have them. Personally, I don’t think that electricity is necessary. Purchase a portable, battery-powered work-light from your local hardware store. This will provide plenty of light while you’re working in the barn. Plumbing is always nice but you can run a garden hose in through a window easily enough. This will keep your building simple, plus it has the added benefit of keeping costs low.

There are a lot more additions you could make to improve your barn and make it easier for working with your animals but I want to avoid just listing off a bunch of things which you may not want or even realize the purpose of them. Rather, I want to stress the importance of viewing your backyard homestead as a learning process. It isn’t recommended that you plant every type of vegetable, raise every type of livestock or purchase every possible tool when you are just starting out. This isn’t a race, it is a marathon. Your homestead should be seen as a way of supporting you and your family for years to come, even possibly generations to come. You will be adding to it, experimenting with it and fine-tuning it for the rest of your life. This is one of the things that makes it such an

enjoyable experience: it is constantly evolving and you are constantly learning more and getting better at it. Start out with what you need to begin with and grow from there. It’ll make the experience more enjoyable, less expensive and less stressful and that’s just good living.

Chapter Summary

- Setting up a barn is a necessary step if you want to raise livestock ethically. While a barn can be converted into a barn for smaller animals such as goats, cattle will need a larger structure depending on how many of them you have.
- A barn is built by first digging out the foundation. A trench is dug along where the walls will stand. This is filled with rock and metal and concrete to create a solid foundation. The floor is then filled in with concrete as well.
- With the foundation in place, walls are built followed by the roof.
- Look up the legality of raising a barn in your local area, not everywhere allows you to raise a structure without dealing with some serious paperwork.
- You want the land you build on to be even and to have some level of wind protection. You will also want to build your barn downwind from you so that it doesn't stink up your home.
- If you have a shed already then you will have an easier time-converting this into a barn than you would building a whole new one. If you don't have a shed, you could always buy a prefabricated one and convert this into a barn easily.
- A prefabricated shed can be brought directly from the supplier but often they allow you to specify your needs. Doing so takes a little longer for them to put together a shed for you but it is the best choice for converting into a barn. Get a sliding door and a couple of windows in yours.
- You don't need to create a concrete foundation for a prefabricated shed, which makes it a much quicker setup. Often the company you purchase from will set it up for you.
- A prefabricated shed won't have electricity or plumbing but you shouldn't need it.

In the next chapter, you will learn how to raise chickens. These creatures are easy to tend to, though they'll need a fence and a chicken coop. If you can provide those and a little bit of time then raising chickens should be no problem.

CHAPTER FIVE

RAISING CHICKENS

Chickens are among the easier livestock to raise and farm. They don't take up a lot of space, they aren't overly demanding and they are fairly inexpensive to get started with. You will need to build a chicken coop (or convert a shed into one) and we'll cover how to do this here. But beyond the coop and a fence, there isn't much that you need to do. You'll want to feed them and provide them with plenty of water, plus you'll want to clean up after them. If you can manage these simple tasks, you should be able to manage chickens.

Before you go any further, you need to figure out two things. The first is whether or not you are even allowed to raise chickens on your property. This is

another of those restrictions that you can find by searching out your local zoning laws. If you are allowed to raise chickens then you need to figure out what breed you want. There are egg-laying breeds, breeds that are grown for their meat or even some breeds that are raised for both purposes. To get a sense of which breed is right for you, you need to consider the three benefits of raising chickens. We'll look at these first, turn our attention over to chicken coops and then learn how surprisingly easy it is to take care of these birds.

The Benefits of Raising Chickens

Chickens are quite productive birds considering the fact that they don't really do much of anything. They just wander around, pecking at their food, enjoying a drink. They aren't work animals, so you can't use them to help around the farm. And they're certainly not useful for transportation. Just try to picture a chicken-drawn cart without chuckling.

But despite this, chickens are one of the more profitable animals you can raise. One reason for this is their low cost to get started. While it will depend on the breed in question, you should expect to pay no more than $30 for a live chicken. This price will often be as low as $3, though this is typically a sign of a less attractive breed. When planning to raise your own chickens, assume that you will pay $30 for each one. This way you can come in under your budget and enjoy the savings.

As said, chickens quickly pay for themselves when you weigh up the benefits of raising them. While patience and the ability to extend compassion to an animal might be considered a benefit, we're going to stick with those that have a direct impact on your pocketbook, your diet or your backyard homestead as a whole. This leaves us with three key benefits to consider.

Meat: Growing chickens for meat is a way to get paid more, faster. Meat birds are typically selected for their size and the speed at which they grow. Some breeds are ready to be sold to the slaughterhouse in as little as six to eight weeks. This level of turnaround makes them a more profitable venture than egg-laying hens but it also means that you need to be okay with spending weeks with a bird that you are planning to kill. For many, this just simply isn't easy to do. However, it is actually crueler to let meat chickens continue to live. Their bodies aren't designed for long-term functioning and they will suffer from heart attacks and organ failure after a couple of months.

The price you can get for chicken meat is calculated by the pound but it can fluctuate widely depending on the local competition and other factors of the marketplace. In general, you shouldn't accept less than $3.50 a pound. If you are lucky you can earn as much as $6 a pound. Most chickens will weigh between five to ten pounds so you're looking at anywhere from $17.50 to $60 a chicken.

Eggs: For those that don't want to deal in quick turnarounds, or those who don't enjoy the thought of condemning a creature to die, chickens can be farmed for their eggs. America's favorite breakfast food, eggs are a pretty profitable venture. A carton of a dozen chicken eggs will sell for as low as $2.50 or as high as $5. If you raise half a dozen chickens then you can expect them to eat about $30 of feed a month, so this number needs to be compared against the cost of the chickens and the cost of feeding them.

Assuming that you spend $30 on each chicken, you are looking at a cost of $180 to start and $30 a week after that. Chickens don't normally lay eggs during the winter months but you can purchase a bright light for their coop that will trick their biology into thinking it is still laying season. Assuming you do this, we can calculate how many eggs a chicken lays in a year. On average, chickens lay five eggs a week. So six chickens each laying five eggs a week gives you 30 eggs a week or 1560 eggs a year. This equals 130 cartons to be sold in the year, which means you can make anywhere between $325 and $780. On the low end, this will not cover the cost of feeding in the year but on the high end, it covers double the cost.

But the best part of this is that you don't actually need to sell them all. Just by raising a couple of chickens you can remove eggs from your grocery list. If you purchase more than $30 of eggs in a month then you'll be saving yourself money in the long end. Plus you can still sell whatever leftovers you can't eat. This makes farming chickens for eggs a highly attractive venture.

Manure: Finally, the third benefit is the chicken's poop. That might sound a little gross but farmers pay good money for manure. It is high in the nutrients that plants need to thrive. And, trust me on this one, you are going to be dealing with a lot of it. One of the worst aspects of taking care of chickens is cleaning up their coop to remove all of the excrement. Yet if you are running your own backyard homestead then you will have a use for all of this crap. It turns the biggest negative of chickens into a major positive. That's pretty awesome any way you cut it.

You will quickly find that they are producing more manure than you can use. Don’t just toss out the extra. Get yourself some bins for storage and store the extra, you can give it as a gift to your fellow gardeners or sell it to local farmers. Just make sure that you place the storage bins far enough away and downwind so you don’t need to suffer through the smell every day.

The Perfect Chicken Coop

Building a chicken coop is a lot easier than you might think. It doesn’t need to be as fancy as a barn, nor does it need to be as big. In fact, you could give a chicken a large box and they would be perfectly content with it. Of course this box wouldn’t fill the chicken’s needs and it would be safe to assume that your chicken’s life expectancy would plummet. But it does point towards how little chickens care about where they live. We should care, though, as we can consider issues like predators and the weather where they can’t. To this end we aim to achieve a balance between several requirements.

But how we get that balance is entirely up to you. You could choose to make a large coop or a small coop, you could make it square, rectangle, triangle

or any other shape your mind can imagine. So long as you can provide these basic needs, you will have healthy and happy chickens on your hands. It should also be noted that you can put together a chicken coop for well under $500. In fact, you could make one for closer to $100 if you are mindful of the materials and the size. But rather than slow the book down to build a coop, let's look at the requirements our chickens need.

A coop first and foremost offers your chickens shelter. If the wind is blowing too strong they can go inside and rest. If it is raining then they don't need to go out and get wet. But speaking of rain, you need to ensure that this shelter actually works. If it leaks every time it rains then your chickens aren't going to benefit from the shelter and they will be more likely to suffer from health issues.

While your chickens could manage with a simple box, it needs to be a large enough box that they can live peacefully. If you make your coop too small for the amount of the chickens you are housing in it then they are going to get into lots of fights with each other and you shouldn't be surprised to find bloodstains on the coop floor. This is especially true during the winter when the birds are at their most agitated.

Speaking of winter, chickens don't like the cold. But they also don't like extreme heat in the summer. To balance this can be a little bit tricky but your best bet is to include a couple of windows that can be closed during the winter. The airflow will lower the temperature in the summer but when they are closed they will trap heat in, which makes them perfect for the winter. Just make sure that you put up some mesh wiring over the windows so the birds can't get out. But even more important than not getting out is keeping other animals from getting in.

One of the most important aspects of any chicken coop is its security. You know the expression "fox in the hen house?" I hope it simply remains a saying to you because to experience it in real life is to experience a massacre. Predators will kill your chickens if they are given the chance, so we need to keep our coop safe. Especially at night since this is when predators think they can get away with their devilish deeds. Keep your coop a foot off the ground with a ramp for the chickens to climb to get in. At night you must put your chickens into the coop and close the door. The door and the wire mesh over the windows should be enough to keep predators out but make sure you keep an eye on the structure to spot any new holes in the walls or floor before a predator does.

Chickens like to sleep at night in a spot of their own, what we call roosts. Different perches are built into the coop and these are then covered in hay or other soft materials for the birds to stay comfortable. Chickens appreciate having a space to themselves to sleep at night, which ties into their need for enough space to stretch their feathers.

Don’t forget that stretching their feathers isn’t simply something they do in their coop. Your coop should be situated within a fenced-in area. Chickens are much smaller than cows or even goats, so keep this in mind when making the fence. You might need to run some of that wire mesh over the fence to keep the birds from slipping out. Some people prefer to let their chickens be free-ranged, which means they aren’t kept in a fenced-in location, but this can lead to problems with predators. In fact, it doesn’t even necessarily need to be a predator that kills the bird. My parents’ old dog once tore apart a neighbor’s free-range bird before anyone could stop her. She wasn’t trying to be harmful, it really did seem like she wanted to play with the bird, but the result was a dead chicken nonetheless.

Hitting all of these features is remarkably easy. A couple windows, a fence and a door that closes give you a chicken coop. If you only have one chicken then it could be one square foot and still work. But before you settle on a coop or start planning one out, you should take a moment and figure out how many birds you are planning to raise. As with most things, it is better to go with a bigger coop than you’ll need when first starting out. It will give your birds more than enough space while affording you the option to increase the number of birds you’re tending to as you get more comfortable with raising them.

How to Tend to Chickens

As mentioned before, chickens are easy to tend for. Your chicken coop will handle the most difficult part of their needs. Shelter and space and protection from predators are all handled by the coop, so what is left?

Well, those chickens need to be able to come out of the coop so you have to open up the door in the morning. This is a good time to check on their food and water and to see if there are any noticeable issues such as bloodstains. If there are then they could mean that a predator got in but chances are your chickens were fighting due to lack of space. However, the odds are that you don't discover any such thing and you can go about with the rest of your day.

The next time you tend to your chickens should be at night. Gather up your chickens and put them back into the coop. I prefer to check for fresh eggs at this point but others like checking in the morning. Either time is fine, there really isn't right or wrong here. Again, check their food and water. Assuming that both are fine, this makes up your daily routine of tending to your birds.

If they don't have enough water then you need to pour some more for them.

Chickens tend to drink somewhere around a cup worth of water a day. They like to sip away at it slowly throughout the day. If you have six birds then a gallon of water should last about two days. Make sure you check the water level in the morning and at night, as too little water can slow down egg production as their bodies won't have the resources necessary to create their eggs.

Chickens also need food. Go figure, right? As mentioned, half a dozen chickens will eat about $30 worth of food over the course of a month. Simply check their food containers in the morning and at night. Top them up when necessary. Just like chickens need water to produce eggs, they also need food to produce them. Make sure you feed them the right food. Egg-laying chickens will need a different feed from meat chickens. Packages should be clearly labeled and once you have found a brand that works you can stick with it, so it's not very hard to figure out what you should be serving. If there is a problem with the food then fights between your chickens and signs of weight loss will make it clear.

Chapter Summary

- Raising chickens offer three major benefits: meat, eggs, manure.
- Chickens are one of the more inexpensive livestock animals to start raising.
- Chickens can be grown for their meat. These chickens should be sold early, as keeping them alive exposes them to a lot of medical issues that would be cruel.
- Eggs are the best reason to raise your own chickens. A chicken lays roughly five eggs a week. During the winter they stop laying but they can be tricked into continuing with the right lights.
- Chickens poop a lot and while it is gross to clean, it can be used to improve the soil of your crops and your compost mixtures.
- If you want to raise chickens then you need a proper chicken coop.
- A chicken coop needs to be large enough for the birds to feel comfortable, otherwise, it will lead to fighting. It must also be secure so that predators can’t get at them. You also want to have a window in place that can be opened and closed to improve the temperature.
- Your chicken coop should also open up into a fenced-in area so that the chickens can stretch their legs during the day.
- Check your chicken coop once or twice a day for eggs. Some like to check in the morning, others check at night and some check at both.
- You need to put your chickens into the coop at night for their own safety.
- Check water levels and feed levels, keep both well stocked.
- Chickens need to have the poop cleaned from their coops once a week.

In the next chapter you will learn what it takes to raise your own goats. Of all the animals in this book, goats are the most versatile and they can easily be

the most profitable if you approach them with an open mind. You'll learn the many things goats help us to achieve, as well as how to tend to them.

CHAPTER SIX

RAISING GOATS

When’s the last time you looked at a goat? I guarantee you that it’s been too long. Take a moment and Google them. Look at how cute those little guys are. Isn’t that a great time? Out of all the livestock animals we’ll be looking at goats are definitely the cutest of them. They’re fascinating creatures, too. Goats are actually as loyal as dogs are, which makes them a great pet alongside the productive qualities that make them wonderful livestock animals.

In chapter four we looked at how to convert a shed into a barn with a particular focus on the needs of goats. This was due to the smaller size of most sheds. They are often too cramped to make for good cattle barns but goats don’t need nearly as much space. However, since we covered that topic we won’t need

to go into it in length here. A quick refresher will be adequate. Goats need shelter from the elements and bedding to sleep at night. They don't necessarily need to be put into the barn at night the way that chickens do but this can reduce the risks of predators getting at them. Of course, a goat doesn't have nearly as many predators as chickens do but the risk is still worth noting.

Goats are a more expensive animal than chickens. They need a larger barn and this typically costs more but beyond that they range in price from $100 to $300 each. While they do benefit from being fed hay and grain feeds, goats have a surprisingly versatile diet which actually makes for one of the major benefits. As you'll soon learn, goats have a remarkable array of benefits they offer backyard homesteaders. They have so many benefits, in fact, that I am comfortable with making the claim that goats are the best livestock animal for inclusion as part of your homestead.

In this chapter, we will look at these many and varied benefits to see just how wide-ranging they are. I'm positive that there will be several benefits which you wouldn't have guessed in a thousand years. With this taking up the first half of the chapter, the second half will move into how to tend to these productive and impressive animals.

The Benefits of Raising Goats

While each of the following is a clear benefit, it is important to note that you shouldn't expect to make use of each one. In fact, chances are quite good that some of these benefits might even be unappealing to you. Don't think that raising goats means making use of each of these. Figure out those that are most attractive to you and focus your attention on them. This will help to prevent you from trying to stretch yourself (and your goats) too thin.

Meat: Goat meat tends to sell for around a buck and a half, which is quite a bit less when compared to chickens. But unlike chickens, goats can grow to be quite heavy. A healthy goat grown for meat will often be around seventy pounds which means you can make close to (or more than if you're lucky) $100 each.

However, this is a hard tactic to recommend. Yes, goat meat can make you a decent amount of money and it is even quite delicious. If you haven't ever had it then I do recommend it. But the problem here is that goats are much easier to bond with compared to chickens and condemning them to the slaughterhouse feels an awful lot like sending your dog off to be processed. Many people who purchase goats with the intention to sell them for meat find that they are unable

to do so when the time comes. However, goats are quite versatile creatures and there are several other ways in which they can earn you money or produce goods for you to use around your homestead.

Milk: Goats can be raised for dairy production. Despite being so much smaller than a dairy cow, goats actually produce a lot of milk. So much, in fact, that the chances are good that you won't be able to use it all. Goat's milk can be used to make just as many dishes and products as cow's milk, products like cheese and yogurt, creams and butter.

Goat's milk can be sold directly to customers but your local area should have codes and regulations in place that could make this difficult. Many find that selling the milk can be a bit of a hassle but it is much easier to sell the products that the milk helped you to make. For example, goat's milk chocolates have very few rules and regulations in place yet they sell like hot-cakes because of how delectable they are. Plus, there's one goat's milk product that is so impressive that it warrants its own discussion.

Soap: Goat's milk can be used to make soap and this is one of the most widely profitable products you can make on your backyard homestead. Goat's milk soap has gained popularity in recent years because it offers a more humane alternative compared to products that use animal fats. Soap made with goat's milk also uses fewer chemicals during the production process and this appeals to people looking for more natural products. On top of all of that, goat's milk soap is less irritating on sensitive skin and this is really its biggest selling point.

You can easily make your own soap to sell from the milk your goats produce. While you should have no problem finding local stores to stock your product, nothing says you have to. In fact, the most profitable approach to selling goat's milk soap (and other beauty products) is the large market for them online. It's easy to sell your products on sites like Amazon and Etsy. So long as you maintain a focus on producing high-quality products then you can be sure that you'll build up a customer base. I would love to say "in no time" but even high-quality products require time and dedication to get them off the ground. But, with that said, goat's milk products are wickedly profitable and I highly recommend looking into how to make and sell them yourself.

Fiber: Goats are furry little critters with rich coats of hair that can be collected. Some goats produce mohair while others produce cashmere. Both of these fibers are used in knitting and crochet. While mohair is more likely to be

used in arts and crafts, cashmere has been used in clothing from some of the biggest brand names in the fashion industry.

The cool thing about collecting fiber from goats is how many options it allows you, the farmer, to participate in. If you want you can collect the fiber and sell it raw and in bulk. This will fetch a fair price depending on your local market. But if you have a creative bone in your body then this is a great way to get your hands on the raw materials you need to make anything from hats to pillows or dolls to stockings. With a bit of dye, to color the fiber, and some creativity, you can make arts and crafts that you can sell locally or online. There has been a recent surge in the number of people purchasing crafts online, fuelled by sites like Etsy, and a unique style will help you to stand out from the crowd. This approach is far more complicated than we'll be covering in this book (plus it doesn't particularly fall into the category of "backyard homesteading") but it can be extremely profitable, as well as extremely rewarding.

Clearing Land: Here's one of the most surprising ways to make use of your goats: Make them get a job. But not just any job; after all, it'd be a little weird to see a goat serving you breakfast at the McDonald's drive-through. Instead, there are two jobs which goats are best for. Clearing land is the first and it is shockingly profitable. The only issue is that it requires either a large amount of time or a large number of goats. The fewer goats you have, the less you can

charge per acre cleared.

Goats naturally chew on everything. Grass, flowers, hay, even clothes and things you don't want them to chew on. It's just what they do, they're mean, munching machines. Well, not so much mean. But they do love munching on things. This has actually created a small industry that functions by renting out goats. Farmers, like yourself, will rent out their goats to landscapers or other farmers who are looking to clear some land. Rather than use heavy machinery, this is an all-natural approach to clearing land.

It might sound silly but this is actually a pretty amazing thing to see happening. It represents just how deeply some people are embracing the idea of natural farming. Goats aren't going to burn fossil fuels you damage the land. They're gonna eat up all the greenery they can and then pass it back out through their body. For those that are using them to clear farmland, they're both clearing the land and fertilizing the soil to increase the amount of nutrients present. It's a win-win situation for them. But for you, it's pure profit. Loan your goats out and make bank based on how many acres they're clearing. Large companies will rent out upwards of 250 goats and charge $700 an acre. Considering that the average farm has roughly 450 acres, even clearing one-tenth of that would earn back amazing money.

Carrying Gear: The other job that goats are great at is helping to carry heavy gear. While many people think of donkeys as pack animals, it is surprising how few people consider goats to be. This is surprising because it is not just hyperbole to say that goats make for the best pack animals around. Their only weakness is that they can't carry as much as a camel. Camels are the best if you are looking to carry heavy gear that you can't break up between multiple animals but goats remain the best in general for three key reasons.

The first is that they can carry around 30% of their body weight in gear. This can be upwards of forty pounds. That's a lot of weight off your shoulders if you're going on a long hike or journey. Of course, if you are going on a long expedition then you might consider this to be too light. However, you can always use more than one goat.

When you start increasing the number of goats you have with you, you might think this in turn increases the amount of weight you need to set aside for their food. But remember that goats will eat anything. They love munching on their greens. While having some food is always a good idea, you don't need to

bring any with you. Even with no grains, your goats will remain healthy and they'll find plenty to eat along the way.

You might also think that adding more goats makes it harder to keep them together but trained goats are extremely loyal to their humans. Remember that these creatures are as loving and loyal as dogs. They can be trained almost as well, too. Trained goats know to stay near each other and their leader, so it is actually extremely easy to keep them together.

Goats are poor picks if you're looking to carry gear across a desert but if you're looking at fields, forest or hills then they're the best. Hills especially, as these little guys are extremely nimble.

Fuel: While most people won't find themselves drawn to this particular benefit, it is still worth mentioning. Goat feces can be burnt as fuel for fires. It doesn't have the best smell, so your neighbors might not appreciate it but goat feces certainly makes it easier to get a bonfire going.

This particular benefit is one that is more important to those who live in poverty or third world nations. However, it is worth knowing that this remains an option. In the aftermath of natural disasters, your goats may just prove to be the fuel that lets you stay warm throughout the night.

Hides: If you are slaughtering goats for their meat then you should make use of their skin as well. Remove the skin and let it dry out. You can tan it to get a texture close to leather like you'd get from cattle. You can use this in place of leather. Anything you could make with leather, you can make with tanned goat's skin.

Goat hide is also used across the world for various items. By leaving the hair attached, you can make a fine rug out of goatskin. In Africa they use the skin of the goat, along with the hair, to make heads for their drums. This isn't the most productive way to make use of your goats, nobody would raise them only to make use of their hides. But if you are going to be killing them for their meat anyway then it is best to make use of as many parts as you can so that you aren't wasting a life for naught.

Eating Scraps: Another reason you don't need to worry about bringing food for your pack goats is their voracious diets. Goats will pretty much eat anything and this includes the scraps from your table. You might not think this is a benefit but it helps you to reduce the amount of food waste you are making

Some food waste can (and should) be used to make compost. As a backyard homesteader, compost is necessary to create rich fertilizers for your plants. But there are lots of foods that shouldn't be composted in this manner. When this is the case, or if you simply have no need for more compost, you can use your table scraps to feed your goats. This is especially great for keeping down your budget (as it can replace the need to purchase goat feed), plus it makes it easier for feeding goats on the trail.

Manure: Much like chickens, goats make manure. Since manure is simply animal dung, you could argue that every single species of animal (man included) produces manure. But the important difference to make note of is the quality of that manure. It is common knowledge that chickens make wonderful manure that is high in nitrogen but did you know that goat manure is as well?

Along with the nitrogen, goat manure also has lots of potassium in it. Nitrogen and potassium are two of the macronutrients required for plants to thrive (with the other being phosphorus). Goat manure also has trace elements of many of the micronutrients and minerals which plants require, though they require far less of them when compared to the macronutrients.

A single goat will produce a bit more than a ton of manure in the course of a year, which should be more than enough for your plants. But one of the benefits of goat manure is that it is easier to collect. Chickens, for example, both poop and urinate at the same time. While their feces should hold its shape, it is much weaker and, speaking honestly, pretty gross. Goats, on the other hand, poop out little pellets and they can pee separately rather than having to at the same time. These are much more solid and easier to collect and it makes for a far less nauseating experience. (However, all animal manure loses its nauseating quality once you get used to handling it).

How to Raise Goats

As you've now seen, there are tons of reasons to raise goats. So the next important question is just how difficult is it? It is certainly harder than chickens but it isn't nearly as hard or expensive as cattle. Mostly you need to prepare your property in a manner that ensures they won't accidentally poison themselves when you aren't looking. It's this annoying habit they have.

We covered how to convert a shed into a goat barn, so we won't go over that in-depth here but it is extremely important. You can get by without providing a secure indoor shelter for them but this would be extremely cruel to the animals and it would increase the chances of predators making off with them. That shelter should be part of a fenced area that gives them enough space to roam around. Within this area, they will also need a separate location for eating. It is best to keep their food away from their beds. They enjoy having discrete locations for each of their activities and mixing places together is prone to agitating your goats and increasing their aggression. If you are milking your goats, which I highly recommend, it is best to have a separate area for this as well. Inside of your barn is best, as you can get some rather expensive equipment

to help out with this and it is good to be able to lock it up at night. The inside of the barn should be packed with plenty of hay both for the goats to be able to sleep and as a midnight snack for when they get hungry. This area is kept clean and separated from the rest so the goats will feel comfortable and they can return to when they are feeling stressed. A healthy, relaxed goat produces far better than a stressed-out goat ever could.

There is a lot of equipment that people don't realize they need for goats, or for any other livestock for that matter. Things as simple as contains and troughs for them to eat from. To keep goats producing at their best you will want to get them a mineral feeder so that they get plenty of the nutrients they need to get their meat and milk fresh. While goats on long journeys can be kept alive with little food, those that are used for producing need to be kept healthy and well-fed. There are brushes to wash their fur, containers to collect the milk in, you may even want to take them for a walk like you do a dog. This can actually be a fun and important step in tending to your goats because it keeps them healthy and fit.

When preparing the pasture they are going to be living in, you absolutely must Google each and every type of plant you encounter. Some plants are poisonous to goats yet they will munch away on them all the same. They just love eating whatever they can get their teeth on. If it's a plant, they'll chomp away at it. Make sure to remove any plants that prove to be poisonous, otherwise, you are going to have a large bill with your local veterinarian and some pretty unhappy goats.

Goats can get sick for plenty of other reasons. They might be exposed to the cold for too long or kept out in the rain and develop a sneeze. They might have something happy internally that you've never ever heard of. Check your goats every day and watch their behavior. Look at their eyes and ears for signs of discoloration or leaking fluids. The signs that your goats are sick shouldn't be hard to miss so long as you pay attention to them and keep an eye out. When you spot them, don't try to fix them yourself. Seek a professional's help. They'll know what to do and be able to pinpoint the problem and provide you with a plan of action and chart a road to recovery.

Chapter Summary

- Beyond being adorable, goats are one of the most profitable and enjoyable livestock animals to raise.
- You will need a barn for them, more about which is found in chapter four.
- Goats have many, many benefits associated with them.
- Goat meat is tasty and it can sell for a pretty penny; goat milk can be used to make dairy snacks, drank as is or used to create soaps and beauty products for sale locally and online.
- Goats are great for providing fiber, clearing land as a natural lawnmower, carrying around heavy gear and creating fuel to make a fire in an emergency.
- Goats can be skinned for their hair and hides, they will eat pretty much any scraps you have left over and they produce a lot of manure which is rich in nitrogen and potassium.
- To raise goats you need a barn for them. You also need a field for them to wander in.
- Make sure to check all of the plants in your pasture to make sure that none of them are poisonous to goats. They will eat them regardless so it is up to you to prevent it.
- Goats should be given a place to sleep, a place to play, a place to eat and a place for milking. These should be kept separate from each other.

In the next chapter, you will learn the benefits that come from raising your own cattle. These animals are much more expensive to raise than any of the others in this book, so I don't recommend them for beginners. However, knowing what raising cattle entails is always useful for expanding your backyard homestead in the future.

CHAPTER SEVEN

RAISING COWS

Cattle are an expensive animal to raise. It easily costs you more than fifteen thousand dollars to set up cattle. Of course, how much you spend is determined by how many you plan to raise but with the higher cost associated with them, it serves you best to aim for several animals considering the cost. It is much harder to recommend that beginners start with cattle, but there are a few reasons that make them a particularly attractive investment to some.

We'll be looking at the benefits of raising these animals before we turn over to looking at how to prepare our homestead for them, and how we prepare them for our homestead. This will be a shorter discussion than goats or chickens, simply because a lot of this is far beyond the reach of beginners. Consider this a primer on why you should start slow and ramp up your production later. But if you are lucky and happen to be gifted with a cow or two or simply decided to

start small and keep it that way, it’s good to have the basics down.

The Benefits of Raising Cattle

Cattle are the most expensive livestock to start raising and so the benefits of raising them need to be weighed against their purchase. Those benefits are far fewer in numbers when compared to goats. They’re about even with chickens, though cattle are worth quite a bit more money than chickens are when all things are considered.

The average price for a pound of beef is between $2 to $6. This is going to vary depending on the local area, as well as different factors such as if you are selling free-range beef or veal. Each of these is going to be a little more complicated than a normal beef cow. This price might seem a little low but when you consider the fact that the average weight of a cow for slaughter is one thousand and two two hundred pounds then you can see how this quickly changes things. You’re looking at easily $2000 a cow. This makes them a good livestock animal for selling for meat, but they also eat more and so raising individual cows for sale really isn’t worth the money.

If you are looking to raise cattle to slaughter and consume yourself then raising one or two at a time can be a viable option. The meat from a single cow can last you quite a long time, especially if you have a good deep freeze. This can save you a ton of money on meat. But if this was the only reason to raise cattle then it might not be worth it. Often it is a good idea for backyard homesteaders to purchase a cow for dairy and then slaughter it for its meat later on. It won’t provide nearly as much meat but it serves a much better purpose.

Cow’s milk is our main source of milk these days and for good reason. They produce plenty of it. Selling milk is hard to do in most states but you can use milk to make other dairy products that have fewer regulations surrounding them. For example, selling milk chocolate is much easier to do and you can typically make a lot more money doing so because people are willing to spend a lot more money for sweets. You will also be able to save money by replacing milk in your grocery shopping, this is especially true thanks to the sheer amount of milk a cow produces. It is unlikely that your family will be able to use it all.

Cows produce a lot of manure and this can help you to keep your vegetable garden filled with healthy nutrients for your plants. This is common for all of the livestock animals we’ve looked at so far but cows, being the largest, produce the

most.

One final way of benefiting from cattle is to keep a hearty bull around. Bulls can be used to mate with female cows to produce offspring. These offspring can be sold to earn money but you can actually sell the service of the bull, too. People rent out their bulls as studs to impregnate other farmers' cows. A couple of hours of work can earn you a pretty penny this way.

How to Raise Cattle

The first step to raising cattle is to purchase some that are already healthy. Your biggest goal when raising cattle is going to be to keep them healthy because healthy cows are productive cows. This begins by first purchasing those that have a clean bill of health. Never purchase cattle without first inspecting them. You want to make sure that they are alert and that they show a reaction to encountering you. Take a look at their eyes and ears for any substances that are leaking. Get as close to them as you can and listen to them breathe. Signs of sick cows include wheezing, sneezing and coughing so if there is anything wrong with the cow's breathing then avoid purchasing it. If the seller can provide you with the documentation for any of their vet visits, this is perfect. Those sellers who are willing to share an honest medical history with you are people that you can trust.

Cows need a fair deal of space. Within their fenced enclosure, they will need an area for gazing. They love eating away at the grass so provide them with plenty. The fence will stop them from running away but it wouldn't actually be very helpful in stopping predators. If the creature can kill a cow then it can get over a fence. A barn will provide shelter from the snow and the rain. A cattle barn will have to be fairly large, as they are big creatures and they take up a lot of space themselves. But cows don't need to be put into the barn at night. Give them the choice to return if they want but you shouldn't be too worried about leaving them out.

When you purchase a cow, you need to then transport it. This will require you to get a trailer for hauling cattle. This experience is a scary experience for the cows and really stresses them out. Whenever you are moving them into or out of the trailer you should try to be as quiet as you can. This will help them to stay calm and not stress them out anymore than necessary. If you have cattle already and are purchasing more then it is a good idea to keep the new cows separated from the rest for a few days or even a couple of weeks. This will give you a chance to see if there are any noticeable problems with the new cows before they risk spreading it to the rest of the herd.

While grazing provides cows with a little bit of food, it isn't enough to sustain them and keep them healthy. You are going to need to have plenty of dry feed to keep them fed. And, trust me, cows eat a lot. You'd think with all the grass they graze on that they wouldn't need to eat so much but that grass is actually to help them be able to digest their food. It doesn't provide them with nutrients, it just helps them to be able to pass their food as manure later. A feeding area should be placed away from the sleeping area. Make sure that there is lots of water available. One of the ways that you can keep your cows in the best health is to fortify their drinking water with vitamins and minerals. This can

be an easier way to improve their diet rather than experimenting with changing their diet. But with that said, a fortified feed can also be a smart idea.

Cattle get dirty often and I always recommend giving them a solid brushing on a daily basis. This helps to keep them clean but it isn't their hygiene that is so important. It is important, absolutely, but getting this close to your cows daily is the more important thing. This lets you bond with the cows over time so that it is easier to interact with them in the long run. It also lets you inspect them daily to see if there are any signs of sickness or injury. This can help you to catch issues early when they are still preventable. If you see any sign that your cattle are sick, such as those you looked for when first purchasing them, you should take their temperature and listen to their heart rate and their breathing. This is information a vet will ask you about, so it is always good to be able to provide them with as much information as possible. Another thing to watch when you can is how much they are eating. One way that you can spot issues quickly is to notice changes in the animal's diet.

That's raising cattle in a nutshell. This is a topic where there is still a thousand times more information to learn but it is also the hardest of the animals to raise. If you are new to farming, start with chickens or goats. Turn a profit or feed yourself with these animals first and then consider if you even need to invest in cattle farming. With its difficulty and cost, you might find that it just simply isn't worth it.

Chapter Summary

- Raising cattle is extremely expensive and it is incredibly hard to recommend it to beginners.
- Cows offer the same types of benefits that chickens do. They can be raised for their meat, for the consumables they produce and for their manure. Chickens lay eggs, cows provide milk.
- If you are looking to breed your own cows then keeping a healthy stud around will be necessary. If your stud is of high-quality then you can make some money loaning it out to other farmers for breeding purposes.
- Only purchase healthy cattle. If you suspect anything is wrong with the cattle you are considering, or if you get the impression that the seller isn't being fully honest with you, then pass on those cows.
- Cows need a lot of space, so a big pasture with plenty of space for grazing is important.
- You must provide your cattle with a barn to protect them from the elements.
- Cows need to be transported with a cattle trailer. When introducing a cow to your farm make sure that you are extremely quiet. Hooting and hollering at them will only stress them out more.
- Isolate new cattle from your herd for a month or two to ensure they are in full health. This helps to prevent any illnesses from passing into your main herd.
- Cattle get dirty quickly and can use a quick clean every day. This isn't necessary but I recommend it so you can get in close with your cows, bond and inspect their health on a regular basis.

In the next chapter, you will learn the many benefits that come with raising your own honey bees. From healthy honey to a hand with your crops, these creatures are amazing. You'll also learn how to raise them yourself so that you can benefit from them and help to keep them from going extinct.

CHAPTER EIGHT

RAISING HONEY BEES

Honey bees might be a surprising animal to think of livestock but they can be an incredibly valuable part of your backyard homestead. They provide you with honey, no surprise considering their names, and this can add some sweetness to your life. It can also be sold for a decent amount of money and the wax can be collected for use in products like beard balms or other health products.

Just like in the last two chapters, we will start out by looking at the benefits of raising honey bees. This will have one or two surprising points in it that I doubt you had known about. There are more ways to earn money from your honey bees than you might have thought. From there we will move into a guide on how to raise them. They aren’t a particularly hard animal to take care of so long as you give them enough space and set them up properly to avoid the elements.

The Benefits of Raising Honey Bees

Honey bees are small animals that don't take up a lot of space. This alone is a major plus about raising them. They also don't take a lot of money. Getting started with honey bees will require you to buy a certain amount of equipment such as homes for the hive, a smoker and a beekeeper's suit. These start-up expenses will cost you a decent penny but ultimately honey bees are cheaper to get started with than even chickens. This cheap cost will be balanced by their space needs, which we will discuss later in the chapter.

For now, let us content ourselves with looking at why you would want to raise honey bees in the first place.

Honey is Healthy: I don't need to tell you that honey is sweet and tasty, I'm sure you already know that fact. But did you know that honey is ridiculously healthy? Instead of adding processed sugar to your coffee, try adding some honey. It has such a long list of nutritious ingredients that it requires a paragraph of its own!

The nutrients include calcium, copper, iron, magnesium, manganese, niacin,

pantothenic acid, phosphorus, potassium, riboflavin and zinc. Considering that honey is sweet enough to stand in for sugar, using it is literally trading out a substance that wants to kill you for one that wants to ensure you stay healthy. And there are a ton of health benefits associated with all of these. Studies have shown that honey can boost memory recall. It has been used in helping coughs and even in treating wounds. There is research pointing towards the idea that honey can help to increase our white blood cell counts when undergoing chemotherapy, though it is safe to say more research must be done in that department. Honey is also good at keeping you energized and it can even be used to kill bacteria and reduce dandruff.

Considering most of us just think of it as tasty, it sure is an impressive substance.

Honey Makes Money: Plus that's just a great rhyme. You can collect, bottle and sell your honey. Local businesses are a popular customer for bottled honey but you can sell it directly to customers yourself. A gallon of honey will make you around $50. However, honey must be strained to have the wax removed from it before bottling. This will reduce the weight of the honey you pull from your bees but it, too, is profitable.

Bee's wax can be used to create lip balms or beard balms. These can be sold to stores or individuals but the biggest market for their sale is online. Bee's wax also finds use in eye shadow, blushes, sand salves, moisturizers, creams, pomades, as well as lots and lots of other beauty products. Bee's wax is a natural product and if you keep your creations all-natural then they can sell for a higher price and appeal to a larger demographic. People love buying natural products. The time for disgusting chemical concoctions has passed.

Honeycomb can also be sold as a snack. It is a delicacy that some restaurants will serve with meats and cheeses. You can always sell it directly to customers but restaurants are a more profitable source of income in this regard. Though, of course, it should go without saying that you will want to try this snack for yourself as well.

Honey Doesn't Spoil: Mushrooms go bad eventually. Vegetables go bad in time. Fruit goes bad. We can freeze them to increase their lifespan but this only lasts so long until time takes its toll and decomposition sets in. This is an inevitable part of life. Try as we might to avoid it, we simply can't.

But honey doesn't spoil if it has been processed. Unprocessed honey that still has its imperfections will last about a year. But if you process your honey to remove these imperfections then it could outlast you, your children and your children's children. Processed honey is pretty much the longest-lasting resource you can produce on your backyard homestead.

Pollinating Your Fields: Depending on what you are growing, you may need to pollinate your plants yourself. This is more common with fruits than with vegetables, as they tend to produce small flowers or buds which need to be pollinated to start the fruiting process. There are self-pollinating varieties of most fruits but a lot of them require you to use a brush to carefully pollinate the buds. This can be a time-consuming process and it is always easy to miss a few buds. But your bees have your back.

Bees naturally pollinate flowers. They go from flower to flower, soaking up the pollen there to help them in producing their honey. As they do this, they naturally take the pollen from one flower to the next, thus pollinating them for you. This makes it much easier to ensure that your fruits will be coming in fully this season.

Renting Them Out: This directly builds on the previous benefit. Because bees are pollinating machines, they are extremely useful to farmers. If you have more bees than you need to pollinate the crops on your backyard homestead then you can always rent them out to farmers to help with their fields. This particular approach doesn't earn a whole lot of money but you keep all of the honey they make and basically just make like $50-$100 a month for keeping your bees on someone else's property.

It's a pretty win-win situation all around.

They're Low Maintenance: Bees are extremely easy to raise. You barely need to do anything. Setting up a hive takes a bit of work but even then, the bees are the ones that will be doing the most of it. Once they are up and running then you'll want to check on the hives once a week or so to make sure that it is staying clean and that there are no signs of infection or warfare (between other insect species).

When it comes time to collect the honey, this will take a little more of your attention. Maybe a couple of hours or so. Say half a day if you are extremely distracted and don't yet know what you are doing. But this only happens about

twice a year. Assuming that it takes you six hours to collect the honey, you're looking at about 36 hours of maintenance in the course of a year. Considering that a year has almost 9000 hours, that's not too shabby!

Bee Conservation is Extremely Important: Bees are quickly becoming extinct. This is a horrifying thought because they are responsible for so many flowers getting pollinated. Without bees, the world will be a much less colorful place. I hope I don't need to explain to you why losing many of our flowers would suck. All that natural beauty…just…gone.

It's distressing to consider.

But raising our own honey bees is one of the ways we can help to solve the problem! These creatures do tons and tons of work for us and they ask for very little in return. They want a little house to home them but that's it. They like to be set away from people. They don't like to be bothered but they also don't like to bother people either. They are very friendly, which is not a trait they share with hornets or wasps. But bees have no desire to hurt you. They just want to help spread flowers and pollen throughout the world.

If any of these benefits seem appealing to you then I want to strongly suggest that you raise your own honey bees. Doing so not only provides you with lots of healthy honey (plus all those other benefits) but it helps to ensure a species doesn't go extinct and that the world keeps some of its color. That alone makes raising honey bees a truly rewarding experience.

How to Raise Honey Bees

Farming isn’t just about animals you can raise for meat anymore. More and more mini-farmers and backyard homesteaders are realizing that raising honey bees is simple, compliments their other farming ventures and can make them a lot of money. But, just like with the chickens, you are going to need to check your local zoning laws to see if you are legally allowed to raise your own bees. Some places have laws against them; as silly as these are, we need to respect them. Begin by first confirming you can raise them on your property before continuing.

If you are legally allowed to raise your own honey bees then you are going to need to pick out a space for them. While your goats, chickens and cows just need a large, mostly flat space, your bees are going to be more specific in their needs. Picking a space for your honey bees is more like picking a space to grow a crop. You’ll want them to have full sun for part of the day but they’ll want to have shade for the second half. Bees also need lots of water, however, you can’t just provide this by adding a drip feeder like you would give a hamster. It is best to position your beehives close to freshwater whenever possible. If you don’t

place them near natural water then you'll want to set aside a bucket or two close to them. When you skip this step you'll find that there are a lot more bees hanging out around your other animals' food area and this can stress out both animals.

Along with water, you are going to want to position the hives so that they aren't going to be assaulted by heavy winds. One of the ways this is done is by housing the hives inside a wooden structure. If you've ever seen a beekeeper pulling honey out of a wooden box then you've seen these structures. The bees don't necessarily need to have this structure but they will thank you for it. If you don't house them this way then they are going to be exposed to the wind, rain, snow and other predators. For their own safety it is best to provide them with this. Plus it will also reduce the chances that they end up taking off for a better home. When positioning this, you will want to keep it fifty feet away from the rest of your homestead if possible. This is that privacy that they enjoy. Avoid placing them near any areas that see a lot of foot traffic. If you don't have the space to separate them at this distance then you can use fences or hedges to help reduce the amount they are disturbed. This can be a smart approach in general, too, as it helps to keep them away from your guests.

Bees should be purchased and installed in the spring. We purchase bees not by the individual but by what is called a frame. These are then slotted into our bee boxes. They can easily be slid out to check on the health of the bees. The frames are filled with honeycomb. You can purchase bees that come packaged with a caged queen. This takes a while to get the colony up and running but it is among the cheapest ways to begin beekeeping. You can also purchase a nuc, which is an already established but young hive that has anywhere from two to five frames. This is more expensive but it can be the easiest starting point if you aren't patient enough to wait for a caged queen to get pumping out the babies and establish the colony. A nuc will come with a queen that has only just started to give birth, which is always a good thing. When purchasing bees, always purchase from a reputed seller. I recommend starting with a nuc. You could dive in even deeper and begin with a full colony but I don't recommend this for beginners. It is better to start with a nuc as they have the possibility of having a honey harvest-ready before the end of the summer. This isn't always the case but it would be at least a year before you could expect the same starting smaller. Let your nuc grow and expand and then add more colonies once you understand and have a sense of the struggles that come with beekeeping.

Installing bees in your homestead isn't a one-size-fits-all kind of operation. Each breeder will have their own recommended steps based on what they are selling you. This means the size of your purchase, how many bees there are, how old they are, all of these factors will play into how to best set up your colony so always listen to what the seller says. While you're preparing to get them in, make sure that you purchase a smoker and a beekeeper's outfit. You might be able to get by without purchasing a smoker right away but I would recommend that you do. However, you absolutely must purchase the beekeeper's outfit. This one can't just be purchased later. It will make your life a thousand times better to deal with bees with the proper equipment.

While bees will mostly take care of themselves, you do need to give them some help when you first set them up. When you install a rack into your bee box, this isn't the same as transporting the bees' entire home. It's more like you cut their bedroom out of their home and moved that. There are a lot of repairs they need to make to make this new box into a home. When they get in, the first thing they are going to want to do is to start sealing up any cracks in the box. This is done to protect the queen and prevent any intruders from making their way into

the box. However, this takes a lot of food and energy to achieve. Bees survive on nectar but they aren't going to be getting nearly enough for what they want to do. Not if you want them to finish their repairs quickly. We get around this by making our own nectar for them. Grab a jar and fill it up to the halfway point with sugar. Pour water into the jar until it is full and then give it a stir. This will create a mostly sludge-like mixture. Purchase a feeder lid and attach it to the bottle. Place the jar in the bee box upside down so that gravity forces it all down. Your bees are going to drink through about a jar of this a day. This is a lot of sugar you'll be going through but it is only temporary. It should take about a month for your bees to finish their job. As they get closer to the end, they will be drinking less and less of this mixture. Eventually, in around a month, you will want to remove the jar. Bees that are fed this way produce a less tasty honey, so it is best to encourage them to head out and find nectar themselves.

Check your hive once a week. This should only take about thirty minutes. You want to see how it is building up its structure. You'll want to see if the queen is laying eggs properly. Feces is also going to build with time and excessive amounts can cause problems. Cleaning it away is as easy as scraping it out. While you're keeping, look for signs of struggle such as dead insects and bees. Research foulbrood and make sure the queen's eggs don't look anything like it. As the bees continue to grow, they will start to need more and more frames. A bee box should only have about eight frames in it. If you are looking at more than you are going to want to get another bee box to support the new growth. Keep in mind that a smaller hive has more difficulties keeping themselves safe, so it can be a smart idea to wait until you can move a fair-sized colony into the new box.

You might be able to get a honey harvest in that first summer but if you can't then you will have one in the following spring. It really depends on how many bees there are and how well they adapt to their new home. You can purchase specialized gear to extract honey but this doesn't have to be a high-tech process. A clean scraper can be used to cut the honey from the frames to catch into a container at your feet. This collects the honey and the wax at the same time. You'll need to separate these two with some cheesecloth. The honey should be then prepared while the comb can be stored or used for other products. Let all the bubbles rise out of your honey before bottling it.

And there you have it. From preparation to harvest, all you need to take care of honey bees. I hope you'll consider them.

Chapter Summary

- Honey bees have so many benefits that they are second only to goats.
- Honey is ridiculously healthy for you and packed with so many nutrients it is almost insane. Processed honey also pretty much never goes bad.
- Honey can earn a lot of money and you can even sell the honeycomb as a delicious snack.
- Bees are amazing because they pollinate your fields for you. Rather than requiring you to purchase self-pollinating plants or pollinating them by hand, your bees will take care of it for you. Because of this you can actually rent your bees out to farmers to help them with pollination.
- Bees take very little effort to care for but doing so helps to preserve their numbers. This is important as bees are having an incredibly hard time and are facing extinction.
- Purchase or make a bee box. This should be placed about fifty feet away from any of the other major sections of your homestead. If you can’t give them this space then use walls or hedges to give them some privacy. This will also cut down on the wind.
- Bees should be kept near water. If there is no water to keep them near then provide them with a couple buckets of water next to the hives to keep them from having to go looking for their own and landing in your livestock’s drinking water.
- For those beginning, purchase a smoker, a beekeeper’s outfit and a nuc. A nuc is a small colony of bees that has already been started. This will make for the easiest starting experience.
- Bees need lots of energy to make their hive when they are first installed. Take a jar and mix it half full of sugar then fill it with water. Attach a feeder lid to it and keep it upside down. Keep this full at all times for a month. Once your bees stop making their hive

and start reaching out they won’t need this anymore. Remove it, as sugar-fed honey tastes worse than honey produced from nectar.

- Check your hive weekly for signs of trouble. Clean away any excess feces on the bottom.
- Honey is harvested about twice a year. Separate the honeycomb from the honey with a piece of cheesecloth, then sell or use both products.

FINAL WORDS

From why you would want to start your own backyard homestead through to planting your crops and tending your livestock, we've covered everything that goes into this. But a book like this can only take you so far. I could tell you exactly how to grow a tomato, down to a day-by-day calendar of what to expect but it wouldn't be any more useful to you. The issue here is that you need to get your hands dirty and do this yourself.

Of course, to call that a problem is a lie. It isn't a problem. It's an absolute delight. Growing your own food, watching as your livestock grow and develop, all of it is an immensely rewarding experience. There is a sense of pride that starts to develop when you take your first steps in this direction. With every additional step you take, this pride grows and grows. There is a reason that farmers and those that work with nature in this way are so content. It can be hard work at times, especially when you're shoving animal manure or dealing with a pest infestation, but that hard work feels earned. It's not the same as the exhaustion that comes from working an office job or cleaning dishes all day. It's an exhaustion that feels right, that is fixed with a deep sleep at night so you can get back at it tomorrow.

I don't want to suggest that you run out and quit your day job. This would be a silly response. As with anything, it is best to ensure you have a steady income in place while you are getting started. But as your backyard homestead grows, so too will the money that you can make from it. In time, you can make enough to support yourself and your family. It's always possible to purchase more land if you need to but this comes in time. Master your own backyard first, then start to branch out.

Remember that this isn't a race and there is no finish line. This is a way of living that you can take with you until your last day. It can reconnect you to the world around you and give you a much richer experience. Many people find that as they get older they feel as if they have lost something, some connection to the world and nature. And I'm not talking about getting to be sixty or seventy. I'm talking about hitting thirty and forty. We have much deeper connections to the world when we are young but then the responsibilities of school and work seem to suck that away. Many people find they need something in their lives to reconnect them and this has led to a resurgence in people running their own

backyard homesteads.

Maybe you feel like you are missing this connection. Or maybe you simply want to save some money on groceries or earn some back each year with the harvest. Whatever reason brought you here is the right one. It is your personal reason and so long as it speaks to you then it is valid. Take the lessons that you learned in this book and start to put them into action. Take your time and learn as you go, building up each new piece of knowledge one step at a time. Before long you'll be running and you'll have an amazing backyard homestead to show for it.

I hope that your harvests are always plentiful and your animals healthy.